

# SCREAM

#22

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ISSUE!

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NEW INTERVIEWS WITH

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## SCREEN #22

It looks like Barlow is happy to see a fresh face! So nice of you to pay him a visit in our vampire edition of *Screem* magazine!

Artwork by  
Bill Chancellor

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Sure, there are a few perks that make being a vampire a thrilling experience: an eternal existence, an always interesting night life, superhuman powers the list goes on and on. But being a bloodsucker has its drawbacks as well dependency on blood can't be fun, missing out on summer days, being forced to believe in God (and fearing a cross) would certainly be a bummer—especially for someone who in life was an atheist. There's plenty of bad to offset the good as a member of the fanged community.

While ideas were coming in for issue #22, a pattern was developing. David Wilt and Heather Drain both turned in vampire-related articles that didn't make it into the previous issue. Our friend Ron Adams had announced that his Monster Bash convention (which takes place in late June 2011) would carry a vampire theme. When I asked artist Bill Chancellor if he would be interested in resurrecting *Salem's Lot* resident bloodsucker Kurt Barlow as our cover creature for the Spring/Summer edition of *Screem*, Bill was eager to take on the assignment. Once the ball was rolling and I contacted the reliable roster of familiar *Screem* writers, the issue was morphing into Transylvanian territory.

Shane Dallmann sunk his teeth into Hammer's *Vampire Circus* and *Twins of Evil*. Aaron Graham interviewed John Landis who reminisced about *Innocent Blood*. Tom Weaver spoke with Norma Eberhardt (*Return of Dracula*). Bram Eisenthal sat down with author Dacre Stoker, and Mike Thomason produced a fantastic piece on the Asian cult classic *Mr. Vampire*.

First time contributors to *Screem* (or new blood as we like to say) answered our call as well. Veteran writer Bev Vincent (author of *The Stephen King Illustrated Companion*) came to us on the recommendation of Mr. King's personal assistant, Marsha DeFilippo. There was no doubt that Bev would be the perfect candidate to write our cover story on *Salem's Lot*. Marsha was also crucial to arranging Craig Modderno's interview with Stephen King for this issue. I owe a debt of gratitude to Marsha for making this all possible.

Bryan L. Yeatter makes his *Screem* debut with a wonderful retrospect of filmmaker Jean Rollin, who passed away on December 10th, 2010. His erotic vampire films have been a fan favorite for over 40 years. And last, but certainly not least, Scott Essman (Scott has produced documentaries on makeup masters Dick Smith and Jack Pierce, as well as producing the 30th Anniversary documentary of *Planet of the Apes*, hosted by Roddy McDowall) dusts off Universal's 1931 vampire classic *Dracula*, to celebrate the film's 80th anniversary.

I know many readers are asking Where's *Nosferatu*? *Dark Shadows*? A feature on Christopher Lee? *Blacula*? *Count Yorga*? The *Twilight* series? (ok, that was uncalled for . . .) I didn't say this was the be-all-end-all vampire edition of *Screem*. We just wanted to tickle your capillaries, so to speak. We will be certain to revisit the Coffin Set in future issues.

We round out this issue with Brian Albright's look at a new documentary titled *American Grindhouse*. Brian's work can also be found in our DVD review section. Joe Wawrzyniak brings us Part 2 of his article "Playboy Playmates in Horror Films," chronicling the gals who bared it all on the big screen and in the pages of Hugh Hefner's publication. Mike Thomason finishes his extensive article on the films of Shaw Brothers Studios, which began in issue #21.

I'd also like to thank our film reviewers. We welcome into the fold Marc Shapiro, as he delves into MGM's DVD titles *Queen of Blood* and *The Black Sleep*. His work has appeared in the pages of *Fangoria* and *Starlog*. Thanks go out to Mike Sullivan, Todd Konrad, Aaron Graham, and Shane Dallmann. I appreciate all their hard work and dedication in every issue of *Screem*. Of course, I can't forget my wife Karen, the driving force behind this magazine.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this issue to two contributors who have been with *Screem* since issue #10: Greg Goodsell and Bill Chancellor. Greg has tackled every assignment I have thrown at him. He has a passion for writing, and a love for film that is second to none. Bill has had his imprint on every cover for this publication since 1999, and I am grateful to have him in my corner.

Enjoy the issue!

*Darryl Mayeski*

Editor

File under: Dear God, more thank yous!

Thanks go out to Ron Adams, Kevin Clement, Diabolik DVD, Mike & Lisa at Something Weird Video, L.J. Dopp, Mike Raso, Synapse Films, Apprehensive Films, Bear Manor Media, Roger Sapp, Paul's Hobby Zone, Richard Mallery, Phil Avelli, Chris Rowe, Bruce Tinkel, Mark Hutzky, Steve Puchalski, Ken Kish, Ed Peters, Kevin Pagan, Bloodgore Video, Mike Lafranier, Dawn Cresser, Roxtar Designs, John and Marc at Monsters Universe, Shade Rupe, and Mike Yurcho, whew!



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF SALEM'S LOT

BY BEV VINCENT

According to the legend, Stephen King was having dinner with his wife Tabitha and long-time friend Chris Chesley in the early 1970s when the subject of *Dracula* came up. King first read the novel when he was eleven and rediscovered it nearly fifteen years later while teaching a high school elective course called "Fantasy and Science Fiction."

How different would Bram Stoker's novel have turned out, they wondered, if the vampire had arrived in America during the 1970s instead of in turn-of-the-century London? King joked that *Dracula* might step onto a street and get killed by a taxicab, or be hauled off by the FBI, having been detected by wiretaps and other modern surveillance.

Chesley had a different take. If *Dracula* ended up in isolated rural Maine, almost anything could happen. People could drop out of sight and no one would notice, or say anything if they did. It was the perfect breeding ground for a vampire.

That conversation inspired King to write '*Salem's Lot*' (working title: *Second Coming*), which became his second published novel, one that is often credited with moving horror out of traditional, Byzantine settings into the contemporary world. In his introduction to a recent paperback reprint of the novel, King said that he felt that "electric lights and modern inventions would actually aid the incubus, by rendering belief in him all but impossible."

"After a while it began to seem to me what I was doing was playing an interesting—to me, at least—game of literary racquet-ball: '*Salem's Lot* itself was the ball and *Dracula* was the wall I kept hitting it against, watching to see how and where it would bounce, so I could hit it again," he says in *Danse Macabre*. "As a matter of fact, it took some pretty interesting bounces, and I ascribe this mostly to the fact that, while my ball existed in the twentieth century, my wall was very much a product of the nineteenth."

One parallel King made to *Dracula* was the creation of a group similar to Stoker's so-called "Crew of Light," the intrepid vampire hunters led by Van Helsing. Long-time '*Salem's Lot* residents Father Callahan, Matthew Burke, Jimmy Cody, Susan Norton and young Mark Petrie, along with "newcomer" Ben Mears, come to believe in vampires and band together to wipe them out. Though they don't all survive, their exploits form the core of the second half of the novel.

*Dracula* forces Mina Harker to drink her blood, a scene directly paralleled when Father Callahan is forced to drink Barlow's blood. Susan Norton and Lucy Westenra share the same fate, staked by the men who love them. King continues, "The scenes from *Dracula* which I chose to retool for my own book were the ones which impressed me the most deeply, the ones Stoker seemed to have written at fever pitch."

Among his other influences were *Peyton Place* by Grace Metalious and Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, which King was also teaching at the time. '*Salem's Lot* is a damning indictment of small town life. When people are converted into vampires, their petty squabbles influence who they choose as their first victims.

King also wanted to bring in grotesquely funny elements from the E.C. comics that were such a part of his childhood and later inspired *Creepshow*. One example he cites is the scene where a group of children, now all vampires, gang up on their stern bus driver Charlie Rhodes. He hears the horn blowing at midnight. When he goes out to investigate, he finds the bloodthirsty children sitting in their seats as if ready to go to school. The door slams shut behind him and the children descend, silencing his screams.

In an early draft, instead of being impaled on knives in the basement of the boarding house, Jimmy Cody met his demise at the teeth and fangs of an army of rats summoned by Barlow. "They attack Jimmy in their hundreds," King writes, "and we are treated (if that is the word) to a picture of the good doctor struggling back up the stairs, covered with rats. They are down his shirt, crawling in his hair, biting his neck and arms. When he opens his mouth to yell Mark a warning, one of them runs into his mouth and lodges there, squirming." Rats appear frequently in '*Salem's Lot*' and in the 1967 short story "Jerusalem's Lot," written as a college course requirement and later collected in *Night Shift*. However King's editor, Bill Thompson, found the scene revolting and "strongly suggested" that King change it. He consented, but later wrote, "I was delighted with the scene as written because it gave me a chance to combine *Dracula*-lore and E.C.-lore into one."

## Salem's Lot (1979)

Warner Brothers optioned '*Salem's Lot*' the year it was published, 1975. This was before Brian de Palma's adaptation of *Carrie* became a surprise hit and before King was a household name. The deal did not include a screenplay from King. He decided to take more money up front instead of increased creative control because he was busy working on other projects.

Certainly, far longer novels have been successfully adapted to the screen, but the stream of writers assigned to the project was unable to come up with a workable script that maintained the novel's sprawling cast. This group included Sterling Silliphant, who would get an executive producer credit for his work, Larry Cohen (no relation to *Carrie*'s Lawrence D. Cohen), Mike Nichols and Robert Getchell. According to Stephen Jones in *Creepshows: The Illustrated Stephen King Movie Guide*, nearly \$2 million was spent on these failed scripts.

William Friedkin (*The Exorcist*) and George Romero were considered as director but, after two years of wheel spinning, the project was turned over to Warner's television division, where it was taken over by Richard Kobritz, creator of the *Peyton Place* TV series. King was initially disappointed when he heard this news. "TV is death to horror. When '*Salem's Lot*' went to TV a lot of people moaned and I was one of the moaners," he said.

Impressed with *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Kobritz thought director Tobe Hooper might bring new dimensions to a TV miniseries, even though Hooper's career was pretty much dead in the water at the time. Though King favored Richard Matheson to write the miniseries, Paul Monash, *Carrie*'s producer, turned in a script that pleased both Kobritz and King. Monash combined characters while remaining faithful to the novel in a way that would satisfy the censors. In an interview with *Cinefantastique*, King said that the intensity was even greater in Monash's script than what ended up on film.

The \$4 million budget was split between CBS and Warner Brothers. Ferndale, in northern California, became the stand-in for the Maine town. The exteriors of the foreboding Marsten House were built on location at a cost of approximately \$100,000. Interiors were constructed on the soundstages of The Burbank Studios.

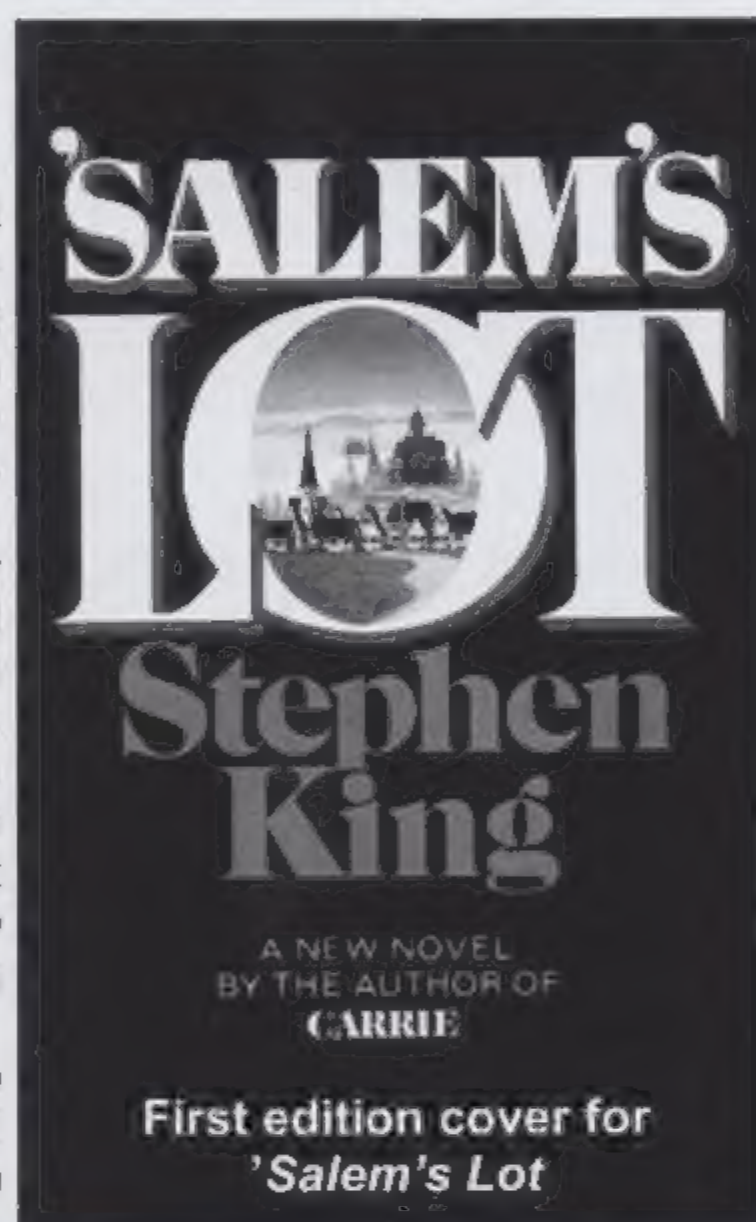
Principal photography ran from July 10 until August 29, 1979, a mere 37 days. Hooper estimated that he was doing 35-40 setups a day and getting no more than three hours of sleep a night. While shooting the miniseries, he also had to film inserts that were too graphic for television that would be used for an anticipated European theatrical release.

In an interview with Tony Magistrale, King said, "When Tobe Hooper finished this movie, there was a lot of serious talk about buying it back from CBS and releasing it as a feature-length motion picture instead of a miniseries. The reason this never happened is because they couldn't cut it in a way to make it decipherable."

King first saw the miniseries at a special screening at Bangor's CBS affiliate, WABI. His evaluation at the time: "It's pretty good. There are fewer characters in the movie than in my book. And there is more in the book about Ben's experience with the house. I think if they had had six hours, they could have done my book."

He wasn't as complimentary about a few details. For one thing, the Maine geography was impossible. '*Salem's Lot* couldn't be close both to Cumberland, where the morgue was located, and to Bangor, where Ben and Susan went to the movies. He added, "I do wish that when actors play Maine people they would stop trying to do that Maine accent. You just can't do it."

CBS aired *Salem's Lot* on November 17 and 24, 1979, during the fall sweeps period. King told *Cinefantastique* that he "objected to the fact that the network showed the two halves a week apart rather than on consecutive nights. I think that did a lot of damage to the continuity of the thing." The fact that the story was constantly interrupted by commercials at the most dramatic moments did not help sustain the suspense.





Critic Michael Collings argues that the miniseries failed because of the constraints of television. "From the beginning, the project ran afoul of network standards, including prohibitions against overt violence (an element endemic to vampire films), and against showing children threatened (a theme consistent throughout practically everything King has written)."

King once said that he visualized Ben Gazzara as Ben Mears when he was writing the book, but Gazzara was nearly fifty by the time the miniseries was filmed. The decision to cast David Soul was questionable. Mears requires a certain gravitas that Soul couldn't muster. He was best known for playing Hutch in the seriocomic crime series *Starsky and Hutch*, and for an inexplicably successful singing career. The closest modern parallel would be a cross between David Caruso from *CSI: Miami* (Soul even whips off and dons his glasses a few times) and David Hasselhoff. [Random observation: what was the deal with the door of Ben's jeep? Was that meant to show that a starving author couldn't afford better? The darned thing never closes. At one point, he has to slam it three or four times before the latch catches.]

The adaptation does a few things well, despite Hooper's rather lackluster directing and the constraints of the medium. Marsten House, the subject of Ben's next book and the reason he's back in 'Salem's Lot, is suitably creepy, both inside and out. It's perched on a hillside overlooking the town. The gabled exterior is foreboding, and bears a subtle resemblance to Norman Bates' house from *Psycho*. From his boarding house room, Ben can brood over it as he writes, slouched over his typewriter, pounding away with one finger, surrounded by wads of crumpled paper.

The interior looks as if no one has touched it in decades. It's overrun with rats and is mostly empty except for the detritus of former residents. The taxidermy animals that adorn the walls are another callback to *Psycho* (as is the Bernard Herrmann-like score and the campy skull superimposed on the moon at the end), except these stuffed creatures are posed as if they're in perpetual torment, many of them impaled on horns. The open staircase that allows the camera to show upstairs and downstairs simultaneously is put to good use when action is occurring on both levels. Monash's script keeps Barlow's coffin in Marsten House throughout, since it has much more visual appeal than the boarding house, where it is moved in the novel.

A few scenes retain some of their impact thirty years later. One is the appearance of Ralphie Glick at his brother Danny's window after he goes missing. Despite ominous music, and some creepy occurrences (including the transportation of the curiously cold crate), this is the first moment when viewers know for sure that the story is about vampires. Ralphie hovers outside the window, surrounded by fog, scratching and tapping at the panes, begging to be let in. Hooper used a camera crane and a body harness to levitate the actor. The fog and direct camera angles hid the equipment, and the scene was filmed backwards and reversed to increase its eeriness.

Another memorable scene takes place in late afternoon in the graveyard, where Mike Ryerson is filling Danny Glick's grave. The eerie atmosphere is enhanced by an ominous wind that sweeps things around the cemetery, and by camera shots from within the grave. Mike jumps into the grave and breaks open the coffin, where a thirsty little boy greets him. The script never shows why he's drawn to the grave, just as the fog at night and the strong winds that arise from time to time aren't explained. The implication is that these are manifestations of Barlow's power.



It's easy to see why Mark Petrie (Lance Kerwin) is so choked up while in the presence of Barlow the vampire (Reggie Nalder).

Ned Tibbits attacking Ben in his boarding room produces another momentary jolt, even though there's nothing supernatural about it—just jealousy over Ben's relationship with Susan. The mortuary scene where Marjorie Glick rises from the dead is also notable, and perhaps Soul's best scene as he struggles to simultaneously construct a crucifix, recite the words of the Lord's Prayer and summon Bill Norton.

Kobritz felt that the suave, romantic, sexualized vampire had been overdone. Instead, he wanted a personification of pure evil, such as the one portrayed by Max Schreck in *Nosferatu*. Reggie Nalder plays Barlow in makeup that makes him look like a humanoid rat, with protruding fangs, hideously long fingernails, glowing eyes and an oddly shaped head. In an interview, he said, "The makeup and contact lenses were painful but I got used to them. I liked the money best of all." Kobritz also wanted Barlow to be mute, telling *Cinefantastique*, "I just thought it would be suicidal on our part to have a vampire that talks. What kind of voice do you put behind a vampire? You can't do Bela Lugosi, or you're going to get a laugh. You can't do Regan in *The Exorcist*, or you're going to get something that's unintelligible."

These changes—despite the fact that Barlow only appears in three scenes in the movie—didn't go over well with much of the audience, nor with King, who said, "The fact that they wanted to make [Barlow] truly horrifying rather than charming and sophisticated didn't bother me, but they made him look too much like the vampire in *Nosferatu*. This is the third time that particular makeup concept has been used, and I think they could have been more original."

The best casting was that of three-time Academy Award nominee James Mason as Straker, Barlow's familiar. Straker's part was expanded so he could give voice to dialogue assigned to the vampire in the novel. George Romero felt this made Barlow a mere attack dog for Straker instead of being a lord of evil. Mason embraced the role, turning Straker into a complex enigma. Charismatic, urbane, sophisticated, charming, and conflicted. His occasional deep sighs make it seem like he doesn't relish the preparations he must make for the arrival of his master. The filmmakers accentuate his conflict by showing first the utterly meticulous antiques shop (where Straker is a clear precursor to Leland Gaunt of *Needful Things*) and then the decaying mess that is Marsten House. It's hard to believe that Straker lives amid all that filth and yet remains so dapper. At one point, he disdainfully brushes the house's dust from his dark suit. (By the way, that was Mason's wife playing Marjorie Glick.)

The rest of the cast consists of a mix of TV actors like Ed Flanders (who would later star in *St. Elsewhere*) and Fred Willard, and veteran film stars like Lew Ayres and Elisha Cook, Jr. Bonnie Bedelia (who appeared in *Needful Things*) is charged with bringing Susan Norton to life, a task made difficult by Monash's script. Her relationship with Ben is underplayed and she is casually dismissed from the film after being captured by Straker. Ben sets Marsten House on fire, fully aware that the woman he loves is still inside (as well as her father, whose fate is known to the audience, but not to Ben). For some inexplicable reason, she still looks lovely when she tracks Ben and Mark down two years later. By comparison, most of the other residents of 'Salem's Lot looked like zombies on crack a day or two after they were converted into vampires.

Though the miniseries follows the novel reasonably closely, crucial elements are missing. Constrained by time, Monash picks just one relationship to represent small town politics and intrigue: the affair between Larry Crockett and his married secretary, "Boom Boom Bonnie," presumably because of the titillation factor it provides. Father Callahan doesn't appear until late in the film, and then only to give a brief speech on the differences between "Evil" and "evil." His relative absence means that his confrontation with Barlow at the Petrie house carries little weight, and his loss of faith plays no part at all. The scene feels like a contrivance for a display of effects (flashing lights, shaking furniture, sliding chairs) that would be more at home in a poltergeist movie. Only Straker's presence (and Mason's charming menace) salvages it.

King's "Crew of Light" is reduced to Ben and Mark Petrie destroying the vampires in the basement of Marsten House. The staking of Barlow is one of the most poorly staged parts of the miniseries. Ben and Mark take several long seconds to admire the sleeping Barlow after Ben finally smashes open the lock on the vampire's coffin, giving the sun ample time to go down. Then, when Barlow pops up menacingly, Ben simply elbows him in the face to knock him back down before impaling him with a stake. This powerful vampire, who crushed skulls and threw people across the room, lies there hissing and groping impotently while Ben fumbles for the hammer to finish the job, after "accidentally" striking the dangling overhead light to create another flickering Hitchcock moment. Straker put up a better fight, although he made the fatal mistake of bringing a banister rail to a gunfight.

The ending was left open in case the network decided to create a weekly series about Mark and Ben's pursuit of the remaining vampires. King confessed that he was relieved "when that rather numbing prospect passed by the boards."

The 200-minute miniseries was reduced to 150 minutes for a three-hour movie of the week for subsequent airings and further edited into a 112-minute version for European theaters and for domestic videocassette release. In these jumpy, cutdown versions, the fate of Susan Norton is lost completely and several characters' storylines are reduced substantially.



## A Return to Salem's Lot (1987)

Larry Cohen, whose early script Richard Kobritz dismissed as "really lousy," declared that he was a fan of King's novel but not of the miniseries. This didn't stop him from filing a grievance with the Writer's Guild, seeking a screenplay credit. He came away with the right to do a sequel. Instead, he created an entirely new story that—despite an image of Barlow and the words "Based on characters created by Stephen King" on the poster—has absolutely nothing in common with either the miniseries or King's novel beyond a Maine town called 'Salem's Lot and vampires. It does, however, have three things absent from the original adaptation: swearing, nudity, and a wry, dark sense of humor

*A Return to Salem's Lot* was filmed in Vermont and New York during the summer of 1986 and released in 1987. It's about an anthropologist named Joe Weber (played by Cohen's regular leading man, Michael Moriarty) who is summoned back from a South American expedition by his shrewish ex-wife. The South American scenes reveal Joe to be a heartless prick. When he meets his ex-wife at the airport, she's convinced that he couldn't pick his son Jeremy out of a crowd, and she's not far from wrong. She gives him an ultimatum—look after the juvenile delinquent or Jeremy will be sent to a psychiatric hospital.

Joe takes the belligerent teenager to a house he inherited in a small town in Maine, where he spent the best summer of his life when he was fourteen. When he got too close to one of the local girls, his sort-of aunt sent him home, and he hasn't been back since. How he ended up in 'Salem's Lot in the first place, and his connection to this woman is one of many holes in the plot.

The residents are none too friendly, the service station won't sell Joe gas or soda, and the house is barely habitable. It doesn't take Joe long to discover that 'Salem's Lot is home to a group of vampires who've lived there since the time of the Mayflower. They came to America on a second ship, the *Speedwell*, to escape their own kind of religious persecution. The Puritans thought they perished on the journey, and the vampires were happy to let them believe that. The community is almost Amish, with few modern conveniences. The children attend a one-room schoolhouse (since they don't age, one wonders how they ever graduate) and the adults socialize by candlelight. For the most part, they survive on blood from the cattle they herd. Only on special occasions do they allow themselves to binge on human blood. To look after the town in the daytime, the vampires have bred a group of human servants they call "drones."

Joe is reunited with Cathy, the girl he fell in love with all those years ago. Of course, she was a vampire (didn't he notice that she never went out in the daytime?) and hasn't changed in the intervening years. He was too young then, she says, but she waited for him. Joe wastes no time tumbling into bed with her. The scenes where Katja Crosby takes off her clothes are about the best thing the movie has to offer.

While Joe is busy impregnating Cathy, Jeremy meets a cute little girl (played by 11-year-old Tara Reid in her first role). She takes him to a wedding between two child-like vampires, the kind of special occasion that allows the vampires to attack a carload of stoned goth teenagers diverted into town by the drones. Cohen's vampires act like zombies when they kill, chewing at necks rather than simply biting, and their victims do not join the undead. When one matronly vampire finishes her meal, she takes a compact from her purse and reapplies her lipstick. Funny little moments like this pepper the film.



## Salem's Lot (2004)

There aren't many places in the continental United States farther from Maine than Ferndale, California. The producers of the TNT/Warner Bros. Television four-hour remake of *Salem's Lot* decided to go one better by shooting in Creswick, Australia, near Melbourne. Locals called the production the biggest thing to hit town in a century. In addition to casting professional Australian actors such as Samantha Mathis and Rebecca Gibney, many people from the area were hired as extras. The miniseries premiered in Creswick's Town Hall as a fundraiser for local projects a few months before it aired in the U.S. over two nights in late June 2004.

Filming took place during April and May 2003, with an overall schedule of sixty days and a budget of around \$25 million. The Aussie location meant that producers had to import vehicles with left-side steering, and dress streets with American-style telephone booths, trashcans and fire hydrants.

Marsten House is perched on a nearby hilltop, visible from just about everywhere in town. The miniseries is set during the winter for the added malaise the season brings to a small town, so the location was covered with artificial snow; however because of a drought, the water for this process had to be trucked in, and leaves can be seen on the snow-covered trees.

Mikael Salomon directed from a script by Peter Filardi, who told *Fangoria* that his adaptation was closer in tone to the book than the CBS miniseries was. "It gets much deeper into the town like the novel did. I expanded the stories of many characters and really packed the four hours with drama. Plenty of shadows and atmosphere." He also updated the story, inserting contemporary elements such as computer hacking, password theft and Internet research. Though Susan and Ben meet face-to-face for the first time, they'd exchanged email briefly while she was in college. Straker runs most of his antiques business online. However Ben is the only character with a cell phone, which means that Mark Petrie and Susan can't call for help when they're trapped in Marsten House. The story depends on the isolated nature of small towns, which is becoming less and less possible in the twenty-first century.

Visually, the TNT version is much nicer to look at than its predecessor but it takes substantial liberties with the characters and the story, starting with the first scene, which shows Ben and Father Callahan in a life-or-death battle at a homeless shelter in Detroit. After tumbling out the window and ending up in the hospital, Ben makes a prolonged deathbed confession to the world's most patient doctor.

The vampires, led by Judge Axel (Andrew Duggan), want Joe to write their history, a true chronicle—their Bible. Since Joe has the proper credentials and reputation, the vampires believe his work will be taken seriously, changing the way outsiders feel about them when they allow it to be published in two hundred years. This seems at variance with their belief that one reason they've survived is because of the power of skepticism.

Vampires weren't enough for Cohen. He throws an aging Nazi hunter into the mix, though viewers might mistake him for a vampire hunter at first. Writer and director Samuel Fuller plays Van Meer ("I'm not a Nazi hunter. I'm a Nazi killer!"), hands down the movie's most entertaining character. "I think he thought I was going to write a cameo for him," Cohen said. "Little did he know he was going to be on screen for forty-five minutes." Cohen used a house once lived in by Fuller as a location for *Return*.

The plot runs off the rails several times, including a misguided effort to draw parallels between the vampires and Nazi fugitives. The special effects pale by comparison with the CBS miniseries (when Duggan hunts, he looks more like an orc from *Lord of the Rings* than a vampire), and the acting is stiff and laughable. Moriarty in particular seems to be sleepwalking through the movie with an impish grin on his face. Van Meer injures his leg at one point and spends the rest of the film hopping around, though he sometimes forgets to do so, or hops when he's standing still. In one farcical scene, Judge Axel reenacts the staking of Dracula as part of a school play, with Jeremy as the intended victim.

The movie ends with the two men dispatching vampires, with the usual cheap frights and campy effects, and a confrontation with Judge Axel in a tool shed where he is staked with the staff of an American flag. Joe, Jeremy and Van Meer set fire to buildings to drive the rest of the vampires into the daylight and then take a bus out of town. They've only been there a few days, but it feels like forever!





As played by Rob Lowe (the original miniseries was the first thing he ever taped on his Betamax VCR), Ben Mears is not a very nice guy. Who would have thought that David Soul would be a better Ben than gloomy, angst-ridden, whiny Lowe? In the novel and the CBS adaptation, Matt Burke, Ben's former teacher, was proud that he'd become a critically acclaimed (if not particularly successful) literary novelist. Here, Burke (Andre Braugher) is no fan of Ben's nonfiction exposés, calling them needlessly antagonistic, emotionally detached and lacking in moral center. *Damage Control*, written after Ben was rescued from the Taliban, led to the imprisonment of three soldiers who were responsible for civilian casualties in Afghanistan and earned him a Pulitzer.

'Salem's Lot is Ben's next target. He plans to blow the roof off the domestic evil that lurks in small towns. Even Susan (Mathis), who's supposed to fall in love with him, has a hard time liking him, especially when she finds out he's been lying. Their relationship doesn't progress beyond a few kisses after she bails him out so he can visit Matt in the hospital. Her mother (her father is absent from this version) is the shrill voice of reason, warning Susan that he's bad news. It's hard to argue with her assessment. He looks shifty and suspicious.

The other major characters have the same names and professions as in the novel, but their natures are vastly altered. Jimmy Cody is being blackmailed after getting caught having an affair with Sandy McDougall, his 19-year-old patient. Mark Petrie is a borderline juvenile delinquent (also fatherless in this version, he and the Glicks break into Charlie Rhodes' bus the night Ralphie disappears) and Larry Crockett is molesting his teenage daughter. Matt Burke represents the perpetual outsider in the community, being both black and gay.

Donald Sutherland is a decently malignant and manic Straker, though the enormous mane of a beard springing from his face like a shrubbery obscures some of his dialogue. James Cromwell is his usual sturdy self as Father Callahan, the priest with a weakness for drink who relishes battling a monster because it might make him relevant again. His confrontation with Barlow, where he asks the vampire if there really is a God, is one of the movie's strongest moments. What he subsequently does to Matt Burke, and what becomes of him afterward, diverges from the novel and messes with what King revealed about Father Callahan's fate in *Wolves of the Calla*.

The TNT version spends more time describing the dark side of 'Salem's Lot and Ben's childhood experience inside Marsten House than the CBS miniseries did, though much of it is conveyed via Ben's monotone voiceover and blurry false-color flashbacks. Many events from the novel are preserved, and some of Ben's thoughts are lifted straight from the book. The Crew of Light comes together as the men and Susan start to believe that vampires are behind the mysterious "illness" plaguing Jerusalem's Lot.

The overall intensity is higher than in the original miniseries, in part because of fewer commercials and the fact that what could be shown on television had changed in twenty-five years. The big budget shows up on the screen, with over 500 visual effects. The vampires crawl on ceilings and walls like cockroaches and zip around like characters from *The Matrix*—except when they're wandering the streets like slow zombies. When they're destroyed, they fall to pieces and fall up into the ceiling. Floyd Tibbits forcing himself into a narrow duct in the jail so he can taunt Ben is especially creepy. The E.C. Comics-inspired scene where Charlie Rhodes gets his due from his former passengers isn't played for laughs.

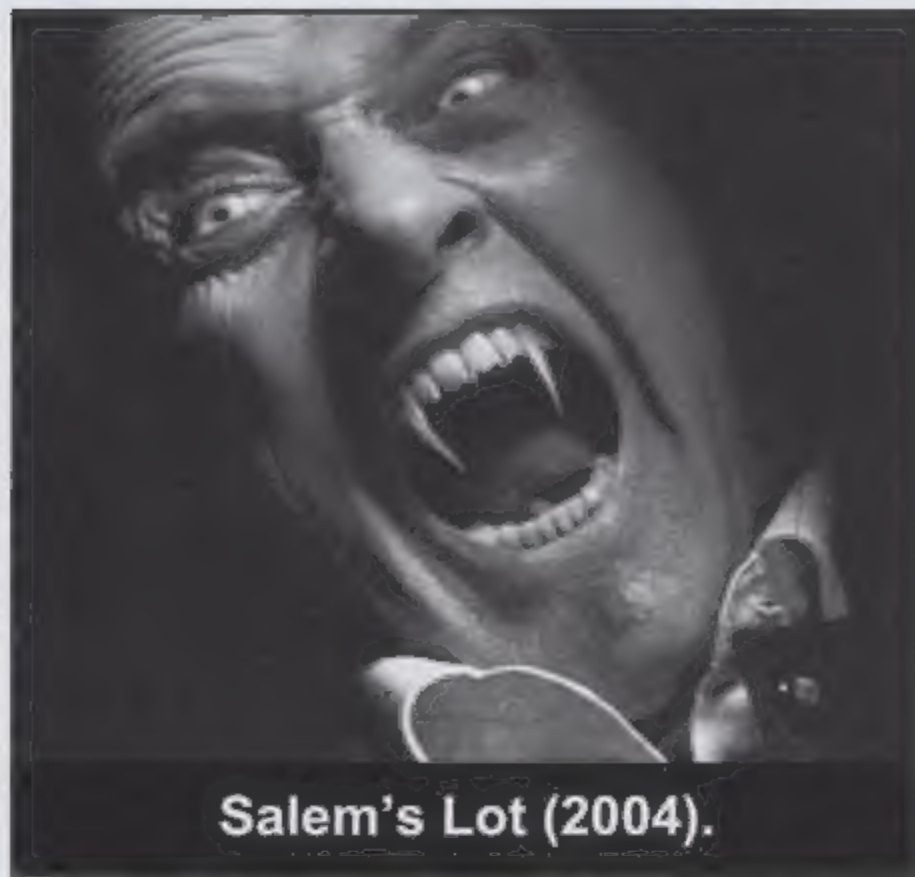
Rutger Hauer is much closer to King's version of Barlow, but he doesn't exude age or power. He's businesslike and conniving. He sweet-talks people into becoming vampires. He doesn't rage against Ben when he's about to be staked; instead, he tries to seduce Ben with fame, money and women. He gets in a nice parting shot, though, by calling Ben the real vampire for spinning tragedy into personal gold in his books.

One of the most puzzling developments comes about when Ben suddenly wonders if the new vampires will return to normal if they kill Barlow. Tough luck for the ones they've already staked if this is so. Since it flies in the face of everything that's ever been written about vampires, it betrays itself as a plot contrivance to give Ben an excuse to delay killing Susan, and sets up a surreal scene in which Susan—a sexy, come-hither vampire with plaited hair—has a casual conversation with Ben where she says she could love him and allays his lifelong guilt about his experience in Marsten House. Her true nature emerges, though. When she hears Mark approaching, her fangs pop out and Ben is forced to dispatch her (Lowe said later that staking vampires isn't as easy as it looks. At the end of production, he complained of a sore wrist from driving stakes into sandbags. Vampire elbow, he called the affliction.)

Ben and Mark set the town on fire, Father Callahan curses Ben, and the story returns to the hospital in Detroit where Mark and Ben confirm that their job is done with the execution of Father Callahan.

With the spate of remakes currently in development, if there's one King novel that deserves a big-screen treatment that honors the source material, it's *'Salem's Lot*. No one has gotten it quite right yet.

**Bev Vincent is a contributing editor with Cemetery Dance magazine and the author of *The Road to the Dark Tower* (nominated for a Bram Stoker Award) and *The Stephen King Illustrated Companion* (nominated for an Edgar Award and a Bram Stoker Award). He is the 2010 winner of the Al Blanchard Award, the author of over 60 short stories, including appearances in the vampire anthologies *Evolve* and *Evolve 2*, and a contributor to the *Encyclopedia of the Vampire*. For more, visit [bevvincent.com](http://bevvincent.com).**



**Salem's Lot (2004).**



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# SCREAM CHATS WITH STEPHEN KING

Interview by Craig Modderno

**SCREAM:** What vampire films have inspired you?

**KING:** Any ones starring Christopher Lee. *Horror Of Dracula* was the first I saw to feature a lot of blood. *Brides of Dracula* was another favorite, because it was the first Dracula film where I found myself paying less attention to the horror because I was lost in the cleavage of its lovely females. I've enjoyed *Near Dark* and a recent movie *Let Me In*, a remake of the Swedish picture *Let the Right One In*. I haven't seen *Vampires Suck* because I'm not much into satire, but I'm glad it's popular.

**Do you consider your book 'Salem's Lot a vampire story?**

Yup. I knew the monster was going to win, but sometimes, writing the story, things change because your creativity yields to your evolving story. I enjoyed the miniseries of 'Salem's Lot, which was extremely well cast and directed by Tobe Hooper, one of his best works. The sequel *Return To Salem's Lot* was dreadful and I had nothing to do with it!

**What happened to the film version of your book *Cell*, which producers Harvey and Bob Weinstein said they would have in cinemas over a year ago?**

They cooled on the project and couldn't get a director they apparently liked. The director they had, whose name I purposely forgot, decided he wanted to change the concept of the book. I believe, like most film fans do, that when you buy a book, that version of the book should be on the screen or else why bother. Once, an interviewer expressed to novelist James Cain that films of his books like *The Postman Always Rings Twice* weren't good pictures. Cain pointed to his books on a shelf and said, "They didn't ruin a thing. They're all right here!" I can relate to that. In my book *Cujo*, the boy dies. In their movie he doesn't. I didn't write the movie. I had nothing to do with film adaptations of my short story "Children Of The Corn," which are on my personal list, along with Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, of worst movies ever made!"

**What is the film status of your *Dark Tower* books?**

Ron Howard is directing the first one, which will be a large scale movie, followed by at least one sequel and possibly a TV series. I'm keeping my fingers crossed on this one.

**Wasn't Steven Spielberg going to make a movie of *The Talisman*?**

He was until the then-president of Universal Studios, Sid Sheinberg, talked him out of it. Perhaps the movie was a cursed project. The negotiations were extremely tough because Sheinberg didn't want Steven to option it. I hope Steven directs it someday. He was a cool guy to be around, and gave an *E.T.* clock to my son and then personally fixed it when the clock didn't work. Steven also showed me sketches of the film that made me feel he really understood the book.

**How close have you come to working with Spielberg?**

I was going to write the script for *Poltergeist*. We had agreed to everything, but then I was on vacation and out of the country and my agent screwed up the deal. I should have written a book about a writer who attempts to kill his agent for messing up a done deal.



**What do filmmakers generally fail to understand when they make movies of your books?**

They don't understand how character driven the books are. I see visuals and speak the cinematic language of film, so they think it's deceptively easy to transfer the books into films. Most of my books feature simple stories and concepts. For example 'Salem's Lot is about a town overrun by vampires. All they have to do is shoot the story which is pure, simple and direct. I don't have the vampires going to a Red Sox game to discuss their theories of life and why some humans are tastier than others!

**What is the good, the bad, and the ugly report card of films based on your books?**

Besides what we've already discussed, the good includes *Misery* and *The Shawshank Redemption*. The bad would include *Silver Bullet*. Gary Busey was right for his role, but his personal problems at the time kept him from giving the lead performance the film needed. The ugly was me directing *Maximum Overdrive*. I was totally coked out and drinking at the time, which I suspect works for a lot of directors but not for me. My producer (the late) Dino DeLaurentiis, who was very supportive and a nice man, told me not to worry because I had an excellent crew. The only problem was they only spoke Italian. So I ended up directing most of the film using hand signals!

*Editor's note: Stephen King fans have two new novels to look forward to. 11/22/63, the story of a man who travels back in time to prevent the JFK assassination, will be in stores on November 8, 2011, and a new Dark Tower book, The Wind Through the Keyhole, will be published in 2012. For more information, visit [stephenking.com](http://stephenking.com).*



# Black and white and red all over...

## Universal's *Dracula* celebrates its 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

By Scott Essman

Two films released the same year, 1931 have defined the horror genre for the 80 ensuing years since they first appeared. Unquestionably, they shocked, horrified, and thrilled unsuspecting audiences in the dawn of the sound film era. Certainly, their leading actors, Béla Lugosi as Count Dracula and Boris Karloff as the Frankenstein Monster—though the latter was originally billed with a question mark—became immediately immortalized as their most famous characters. Each man had lengthy turns on stage and in other films before and after the 1931 films, but their performances were so iconic in appearance, body language, mannerisms, intonations, and screen presence, audiences would forever identify the actors by the titles of these first breakthrough horror films.

In fact, one can point to *Dracula* and its impact in films as setting a precedent for all horror movies that came after it, not only at Universal, but also in the entirety of mainstream studio production. Dozens of horror productions followed *Dracula* in the 1930s and 1940s until a post-World War II lull that was only periodically reversed in the late 1950s with Hammer Films' output and again in the mid-1970s due to the wild popularity of *The Exorcist*. Had it not been for *Dracula* arriving at the time and place it did, the ensuing 15-year mélange of Universal's best work might never have come to fruition. Thus, *Dracula*'s impact cannot in any way be underestimated.

Undoubtedly, the success of *Dracula* and its legacy in films is due in part to Béla Lugosi's genius for playing the character, director Tod Browning and cinematographer Karl Freund's combined genius for filming the movie, and Jack Pierce's makeup concepts. Lugosi was born Béla Ferenc Dezső Blasko on October 20, 1882, in Hungary. According to published accounts, he joined Budapest's National Theater in 1913. Later, he appeared in several Hungarian films under the pseudonym Arisztid Olt. After World War I, he helped the Communist regime nationalize Hungary's film industry. Soon after, he barely escaped government arrest and fled to the United States in 1920.

It has passed into legend that Lugosi performed *Dracula* live on stage in the 1920s, with the most famous production occurring on Broadway in New York in 1927. After the success of the 1927 run of the play, it would only be a matter of time before the major studios would take interest in a film version. Hollywood soon beckoned, as Universal's head of production, Carl Laemmle, Jr., had decided to make film versions of noted horror novels. Laemmle, Jr.'s first major acquisition to go into preproduction was the 1897 Bram Stoker classic, *Dracula*, though there was much speculation as to who would play the Count. Certainly, Lugosi had popularized the character on the stage, but he was not a film star at the time. Rumors abounded that Lon Chaney might be courted back to Universal from MGM, but much of this is pure speculation and not based on fact. Other actors were considered for the part, which ultimately went to the man who had made the role famous—Lugosi.

In 1922, audiences were treated to the German silent classic *Nosferatu*, but by the late 1920s, an Americanized version beckoned, if one could call it that. Hungarian Lugosi was a natural for the screen version, and by the late 1920s, a sound film bearing his unmistakable accent was possible. However, director Tod Browning had long considered Lon Chaney for the role as he was his partner on several great silents at MGM, including the vampire film, *London After Midnight*. Yet, a small glitch in the plans lay in the way—Universal owned the American rights to *Dracula*. It was head of production Carl Laemmle, Jr.'s dream to bring it to celluloid. In 1930, when Browning moved his offices to Universal City Studios to prepare the film, all bets were off when Chaney died of throat cancer that summer.

Browning would pair with Lugosi for the screen version, with a screenplay by Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston from their stage play and screenwriter Garrett Fort providing a cinematic adaptation. With varying degrees of success, the mainstays of the stage play were intact for the film version—Count Dracula as a romantic anti-hero. Lugosi's presence and Karl Freund's cinematography carry the film despite Browning's eerily lugubrious pace. In fact, as adapted for the screen, the most effective elements of the play that resonate in the film include Lugosi's unforgettable line readings, "I bid you welcome," and "I am Dracula," plus the often-imitated, "I never drink wine." Much of the staging of the film is haunting and gothic albeit slow-moving by modern standards.



Undoubtedly, Universal's head of makeup in 1930, Jack Pierce, was heavily inspired by his Universal stablemate Lon Chaney and his mastery of makeup techniques in the early 1920s and again at Universal with *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in 1923 and *The Phantom of the Opera* in 1925. Though Chaney moved to MGM in 1924 for their first film, *He Who Gets Slapped*, and starred in MGM films through the decade, Pierce was certainly impressed with Chaney's Man With the Beaver Hat vampire character in *London After Midnight* in 1927. With *Dracula* in production at Universal just three years later (Chaney was gravely ill and died during the planning stages of the film), the onus was on Pierce to create a character equal in impact to Chaney's vampire from *London After Midnight*.

Alas, Jack Pierce's first attempt to create an unforgettable screen character in the new sound era of filmmaking was essentially thwarted by the star of the first project "greenlit" by Junior Laemmle in 1930. While *Dracula* afforded Pierce the chance to bring a vampire character unlike any seen before to the screen, Béla Lugosi arrived in California with different plans. As Lugosi had always applied his own makeup on stage, including a famed 1927 production on Broadway, he assumed the same situation would occur in Universal's film version.

Though Lugosi was steadfast that he make himself into the cinematic version of Count Dracula, relegating Jack Pierce to designing a green greasepaint for the character (through Max Factor's organization), Pierce's stamp is certainly on the film as he likely designed the widow's peak hairstyle in concert with hairstyling department head Lily Dirigo. Instead of working on the title character, Pierce, Dirigo, and costume designer Vera West collaborated to create the looks for Renfield, Helen Chandler as Mina, and the Count's brides.

At the beginning of the film, when the coach carrying Renfield (the inimitable Dwight Frye) to Dracula's castle pulls up and we see the castle atop a hill, the effect is a "glass shot" that visual effects master John P. Fulton expertly blended into the production. No real castle actually existed—the image of the castle is actually a painting on glass that Fulton filmed in such a way that it appeared to dwarf the actors. Fulton would go on to deliver classic visual effects in the rest of Universal's horror cycle until 1947. Of course, the legendary Carla Laemmle, Universal founder Carl Laemmle's niece, delivers the first spoken words in the film when she speaks inside of the coach. When Renfield enters the decrepit castle, it is a masterwork of art direction by Charles D. Hall, one of the truly unsung heroes of the early Universal horror films. Hall's gothic sets, especially the interiors of Count Dracula's Transylvanian castle and the crypt in the basement of the abbey in England, are in a way a "character" in the film, and are crucial to the mood and feel of the film. Following his genius additions to *Dracula*, which doubled as the sets in the Spanish-language version that was filmed at night during production, Hall would go on to arguably greater success at Universal with *Frankenstein*, and contributed memorably to *The Invisible Man* and *Bride of Frankenstein* in the Laemmle era.

Costume designer Vera West, who like Jack Pierce and John Fulton, designed the entire run of Universal horror films from 1931-1947, brings the theatricality of *Dracula* to the screen with grace, especially giving Lugosi himself instantly memorable outfits for all of his incarnations in the film. One of the last key craftspeople to impact the film was editor Milton Carruth. Joining the production team at Universal for the 1930 release of *All Quiet on the Western Front* was 30-year-old Carruth in only his fifth known post-production credit. Later that year, armed with the success of *Western Front*, when Universal designed to usher in a new breed of motion picture for the "talkies" with the horror movie, they brought in Carruth. Notably, *Dracula* featured Carruth's innovative cutting, creating near hysteria in nationwide audiences when it was released. Relying on Karl Freund's moody cinematography, and without the presence of music, Carruth created shuddering dread with his inspired cuts from Dracula's many victims to a demonic Lugosi, often shown in Browning and Freund's possessed close-ups. It is in his close-ups that Lugosi really shines, almost literally, as cinematographer Karl Freund shoots Lugosi's haunting stares with an eerily still glow. Of note, Freund (and undoubtedly Carl Laemmle, Jr.) so relished Carruth's work, they brought him in to edit Freund's directorial debut, *The Mummy*, the next year. Again, Carruth provided stylish touches that energized what was a slow-moving film that depended on mood and performance to build suspense.



Filmed in 1930 and released mid-February of 1931, *Dracula* became an immediate cultural phenomenon on many levels. The film shocked and scared audiences to near unconsciousness. The many lines in the script became instant catch-phrases that lasted until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, if not longer. The character became an icon so strong and so recognizable, he is still Universal's most familiar screen monster and one of the most copied characters in cinema history. Elements of the film became synonymous with vampire lore in general—the dreaded mirror, the sight of blood engendering vampiric lust, the flying bat, the prancing wolf, the cobweb-filled castle, the mania of Renfield, the coffin laying in catacombs, and the driving deadly stake. Lastly, but most relevantly, everything about Lugosi became cryptic, menacingly real, and instantly unforgettable. Foremost, his dark brooding features, handsome but stalking, made his face and the character indistinguishable. Next, his deep Hungarian-accented line readings were nearly all memorable. Finally, his overall appearance, with cape, tuxedo, and perfectly choreographed hand gestures and body language, drove the entire production. The only remaining question after the commercial, aesthetic, and cultural success of *Dracula* would be, "What's next for the man who so eloquently and symbolically played the Count?"



**Creepy personified:**  
Dwight Frye as Renfield.

When the Universal brass clamored for a follow-up to *Dracula*, Lugosi was originally cast as the Monster when screenwriter-director Robert Florey was putting together the next Universal horror effort, *Frankenstein*. Junior Laemmle dismissed the test footage, claiming that the Lugosi Monster was too derivative of the title character in the German classic *Der Golem* (1920). When both Lugosi and Florey were subsequently assigned to *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), an incalculable opportunity arose for Jack Pierce, Universal, and fans of horror film when Pierce went on to create the Frankenstein Monster makeup with Boris Karloff. One can only speculate what has happened to the 1931 test footage of Lugosi as the Frankenstein Monster.

Ironically, Béla Lugosi and Boris Karloff may never have been the close friends that we all hoped they were, but they were undeniably the two greatest horror actors in cinema history. Certainly, Lon Chaney played three of the all-time classic horror characters, but he was not exclusively a horror actor—in fact, most of his parts were outside the genre. His son, Lon Chaney, Jr., played more horror characters than Lugosi or Karloff during his years at Universal, but he arguably played second fiddle to his more senior colleagues in the 1940s, with each of them having long since established themselves by the time of Chaney, Jr.'s arrival. In the late 1950s, Christopher Lee certainly matched Lugosi and Karloff character for character but his performances and the films they were in failed to have the impact of the earlier classics. There is no actor who came before or since who has made his mark as deeply and greatly as Béla and Boris.

However, in 1936, Carl Laemmle Senior and Junior put their final Universal pictures into production. Just before cash problems forced the Laemmles to sell the studio in 1937 they managed to make *Dracula's Daughter*, featuring a stunning and yet simple Jack Pierce makeup on Irving Pichel. A sequel to 1931's *Dracula*, the film was the last horror picture that the Laemmles produced but did not feature Lugosi in the cast. Pierce also worked on James Whale's *Showboat* that year, a final bow for the father-son production team. Sadly, Senior Laemmle passed away in 1939; Junior passed forty years later, never having produced another film after leaving Universal (though he dabbled at MGM for a time in the late 1930s).

In 1943, Universal cast Chaney, Jr. as the lead character in the atmospheric horror thriller *Son of Dracula*, oddly, a dozen years after the first *Dracula* and seven years after *Dracula's Daughter*—an atypical practice for the release of sequels in that time period. Though *Son of Dracula* did not offer Pierce the challenge of creating a completely original monster character in the same stead as his other horror creations, it allowed him the chance to use his considerable hair work skills. And Lugosi was not present.



Though he had briefly been considered to play *Dracula* in 1931, it took John Carradine until 1944 to play Count Dracula, and he did so working with Pierce in *House of Frankenstein* and again in 1945 in *House of Dracula*. In *House of Dracula*, Pierce again demonstrated his hair work abilities that Lugosi memorably donned in *Son of Frankenstein*, when Pierce made a mad scientist of actor Onslow Stevens. But this last picture in the classic cycle, even with the character of Dracula included, sadly did not feature Lugosi.

Béla Lugosi would don the cape only one more time to play Count Dracula, for Universal Studios' *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* in 1948, a full 17 years after his unprecedented success in *Dracula*; this time his Dracula inexplicably became the Frankenstein Monster's caretaker and "master." By that point, Vera West, John Fulton, and Jack Pierce were no longer at the studio, which they helped make famous. Oddly, those two screen appearances are the only two times Lugosi actually

played the character though he also played in numerous stage versions of *Dracula* and in vampire films including 1935's *Mark of the Vampire*. By 1947 after a merger with International Pictures, Universal's key department heads, including Jack Pierce, had been replaced.

Of the many *Dracula* adaptations that have come since the 1931 film, with additional appearances by the character dozens of times in numerous other productions, none quite captures the essential qualities of the original Universal motion picture. Even a tacked-on score by Philip Glass for a 1999 re-release of the film could not obscure the meditative unfolding of the frightful tale.

Certainly, Lugosi's career dwindled in the 1950s as he ended up appearing in Ed Wood's notoriously low-budget films. He died in Los Angeles on August 16, 1956 and was reportedly buried in his Count Dracula Cape. Nevertheless, the man left a legacy for all time. His mark is permanently imprinted on the films in which he appeared, the horror genre in general, and the rich overall history of screen characters. Now, we celebrate Lugosi in 2011 as the icon that he was, bringing great enjoyment to anyone who has ever watched one of his performances. Lugosi and Karloff, in one magical year became instantaneous movie royalty, and both men, European emigrés, gave America its greatest two horror characters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and likely for eternity.

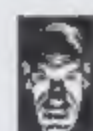
Nonetheless, when it was released in February of 1931, *Dracula* was an unqualified smash. Most obviously, the appearance of Lugosi in character as Count Dracula in full makeup, costume, hairstyling, stands as one of the indelible images in cinema history. Based nearly in total on the 1931 film, Lugosi's thick Hungarian accent, fluid bodily movements and hand gestures, and pallid facial stares and smiles cemented his performance in the minds of viewers for the past eight decades as the definitive Count Dracula. Moreover Lugosi's idiosyncratic vocal stylings in the film remain unforgettable touchstones in American popular culture. In the end, Count Dracula, though the character and numerous spinoffs, extractions, and parallels have appeared since, is certainly remembered most strongly as a Béla Lugosi creation and the best version of the story on film of all time.



**Dracula and Mina**



**Béla looks puzzled when he sees his reflection in a mirror.**





# FANGS FOR THE MEMORIES: HOPPING ALONG WITH MR. VAMPIRE

BY MICHAEL THOMASON

One wet and blustery winter's day, some thirty years or more ago (1976 to be precise), a childhood love of dinosaurs saw me convince my parents to part with their money for an issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* that contained a feature on the works of Willis O'Brien (of *King Kong* fame). For a young and impressionable mind fired by the power of imagination, the remainder of the more directly horror-centric articles in the issue fairly swiftly led to an interest in the classic monsters of the silver screen. Much to the disappointment of my parents, I might add, as well as numerous sleepless nights following viewings of some of those very same monster movies via the late-night weekend TV horror-spot, *The Nightmare Theatre*. But the late, great Mr. Ackerman did what he did with his wonderful nostalgic publication, and many years on I will never begrudge him that. For in addition to an interest in the horror film genre, Forry taught me another great lesson: the literary is just as important as the cinematic, and the imagination a more vibrant tool than the visual.

Having come to the horror film genre when I did (i.e., born in the late sixties, grew up in the seventies and early eighties), the classics of my era were those of British production house, Hammer Films. Although a blanket ban on horror films had been enforced in Australia by the Chief Censor in 1948, which didn't see abolition until 1968, with a few scissor snips here and there after the ban was lifted, horror became the new black with the moviegoing public. Of course, by that late stage of the game, the majority of films that had been released overseas in that twenty year gap were rather dated, which led them to be sold in packages to Australian television as "filler" programming. Hammer rapidly became my studio *du jour* and the likes of Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing filled their places as my all-time favorite Dracula and Frankenstein, respectively.

Meanwhile, in an age before the Internet, I read! And like any genre-loving kid of my generation, I amassed books, not just on the movie monsters but also the fictional works that inspired them and reference tomes that chronicled the mythology behind the movies. Naturally, what came to fascinate me most was that societies and cultures the world over had their own unique variations on the many myths and legends, folklore and fairytales, spirits and monsters that had, until that stage, been historical fiction of my own Anglo-Saxon heritage. Many years on, with the escapism of youth evolving into the escapism of adulthood, the next generation's *Famous Monsters*, *Fangoria*, ran a two-part article (across two issues) on the fantastic cinema of Hong Kong. With their many unusual and outrageous key points discussed (a majority of which, as time passed, proved to be little more than "creative fiction"), the genre cinema of Hong Kong sounded like the wilder and more enthusiastically excessive Chinese cousin of the films I had grown up with. From the hyperbolic descriptions, part of me just knew I wouldn't be similarly invigorated until I had seen some, if not all, of the films *Fangoria*'s writer covered in that twin issue delight.

As anyone who has garnered an affinity for the cinematic output of a country that is outside their immediate realm of accessibility will attest, the actual task of seeing or tracking down said films is sometimes more of an adventure than the films themselves. Fortunately for this writer, my residential home is the Western Australian city of Perth, which harbors a healthy Asian population, the predominant of which is Chinese. Thereby, at the time, there were two major Chinese language cinemas and a wealth of Chinese language video stores; persistence within both eventually turned up one of my many Holy Grails of Hong Kong cinema: the trendsetting horror comedy *Mr. Vampire* (1985). But elusive catch he was as, within that almost completely alien terrain of Chinese cinema adoration, new films were (and still are) more readily accessible than old, and many films now lauded by Western critics as classics of both their genre and industries are more often than not treated dismissively by the domestic market for which they were made. Luckily for everyone, at the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the home video medium of DVD meant that Ricky Lau's amazing, as well as astoundingly funny, vampire opus would finally become widely (and globally) accessible for all and sundry.



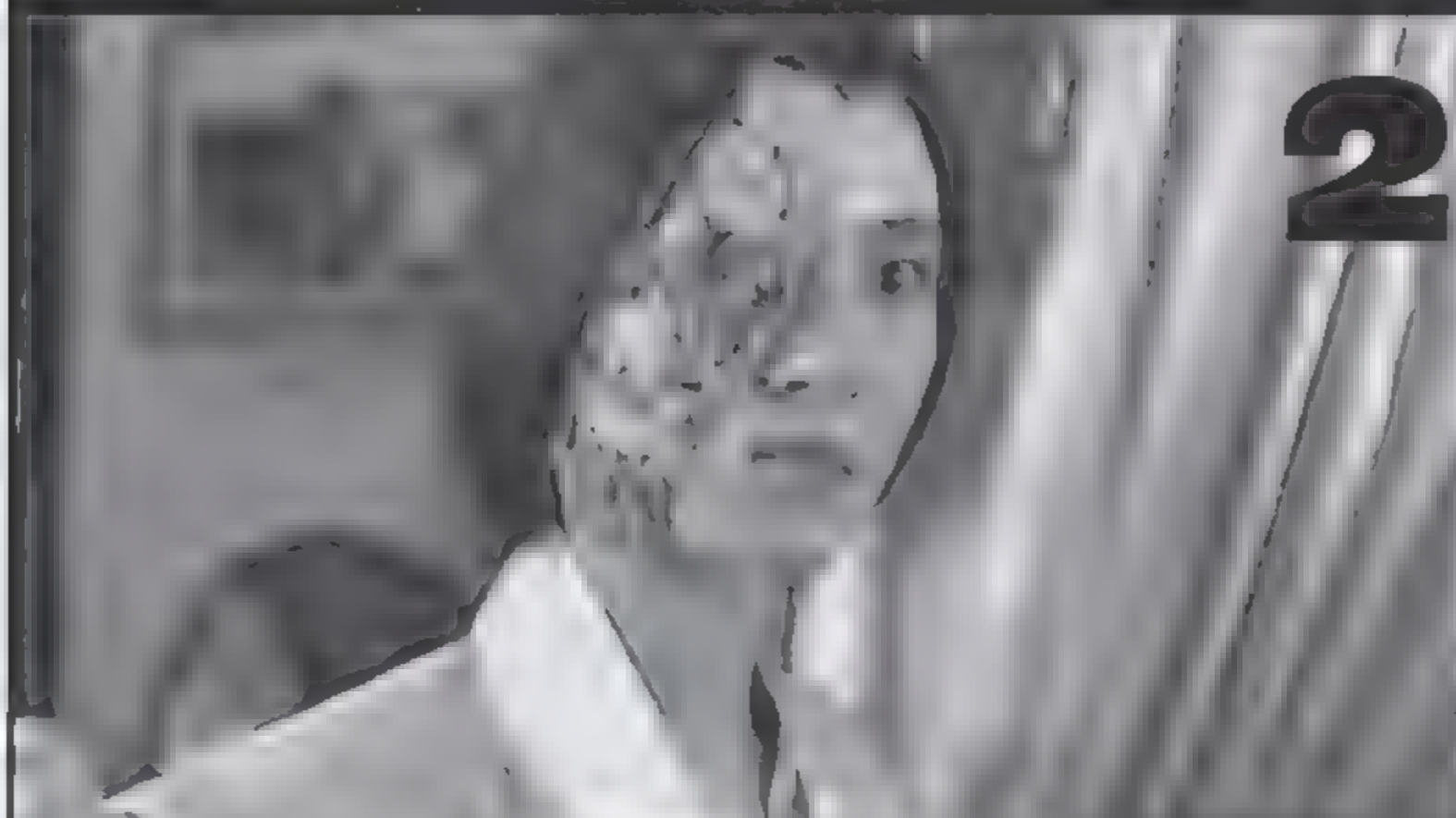
**Chin Siu Ho pranks Ricky Hui, with some rather hilarious consequences.**

Opening its story in the early years of the twentieth century and at the tail end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), *Mr. Vampire* wastes absolutely no time placing its viewer in the thick of the action, as well as exposing them to the uniquely Chinese folklore of the *jiang shi* (or *kong si* in the Cantonese dialect, sometimes mistakenly attributed by the Japanese variant *kyonshi*). Whilst preparing for a *corpse-walk* Taoist Priest Sai-Muk (Anthony Chan) leaves the preparation of the corpses for the journey in the capable hands of his assistants Man Choi (Ricky Hui) and Chou Chun (Chin Siu Ho). Of course, as is usually the case in these instances, one of the assistants can't help himself from goofing off and frightening his colleague, thus Chou dons false fangs and a burial costume to spook his more sombre partner. But we all know tomfoolery leads to disaster, so consequently the *fu* (Chinese paper talismans) are stripped from the waiting corpses' foreheads and a mini-apocalypse ensues. It's up to Sai-Muk's fellow priest, Master Ko (Lam Ching Ying), to put his martial arts divinity to work and best the tiny army of hopping vampires before things get out of hand. Once the mess is cleaned up and Chou and Man are chastised for their irreverence, things return to normal and Sai-Muk commences his *corpse-walk* taking the small legion of dead on their final journey.

Inevitably, the remaining team of Ko, Chou and Man are faced with a tougher challenge in the absence of their senior master when local businessman Yam (Wong Ha) comes to Ko in an attempt to resolve the bad *feng shui* his family has been experiencing. Ko determines that errant fortune is a result of the (lacking) ethics of Yam's deceased father who deceived a fortune teller out of his burial plot. The resolution is for Yam to exhume his father and relocate his remains in more prestigious grounds. It comes as something of a surprise to all when Yam Sr is exhumed and his corpse shows no signs of decomposition, even though he had been interred twenty years before. More worrisome to all is the corpse's imminent resuscitation, as it is discovered he retained his last breath before death, being that this will pose a direct threat to his immediate family, Yam and his daughter Ting (Moon Lee). Efforts to circumvent his resurrection fail and it's not long before the freshly awakened vampire is hopping about the township. Add to that Chou attracting the unwanted affections of wandering *fox spirit* Jade (Pauline Wong), as well as Man's accidental vampirism in one of the many tussles with their nemesis, and priest-in-charge Ko has more than his fair share of monumental supernatural shenanigans to deal with.

Though there are countless other vampire films that assuredly fit the bill of classics within their subgenre, ultimately what set *Mr. Vampire* apart from the many was that, along with the *Chinese Ghost Story* (1987-1992) series, at its time of discovery it became an almost magical window to the myths, legends and folklore of another culture (and a culture that is arguably the oldest historically documented in the world). For many international viewers *Mr. Vampire* was the benchmark of seemingly outrageous and absurd rituals and foreign mythology, and an almost indescribable array of cross-pollinating genres (horror comedy, martial arts, etc.) and alien ideals that were too extreme to possibly have any grounding in the literary or historical. But for a niche pocket of followers, it was the introductory vessel that inspired further reading, research and appreciation of Chinese culture. It should be pointed out that, though often cited as the first major *jiang shi* feature, Shaw Brothers studios preceded *Mr. Vampire* by six years with Liu Chia Liang's martial arts-horror-comedy *The Spiritual Boxer II* (1979) (aka: *The Shadow Boxing*), which not only showcased the *jiang shi* but also delved into the ritual of *corpse-walking* and the world of the *corpse herders* (for further reading see "Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio Part 1" in *Scream* #21).

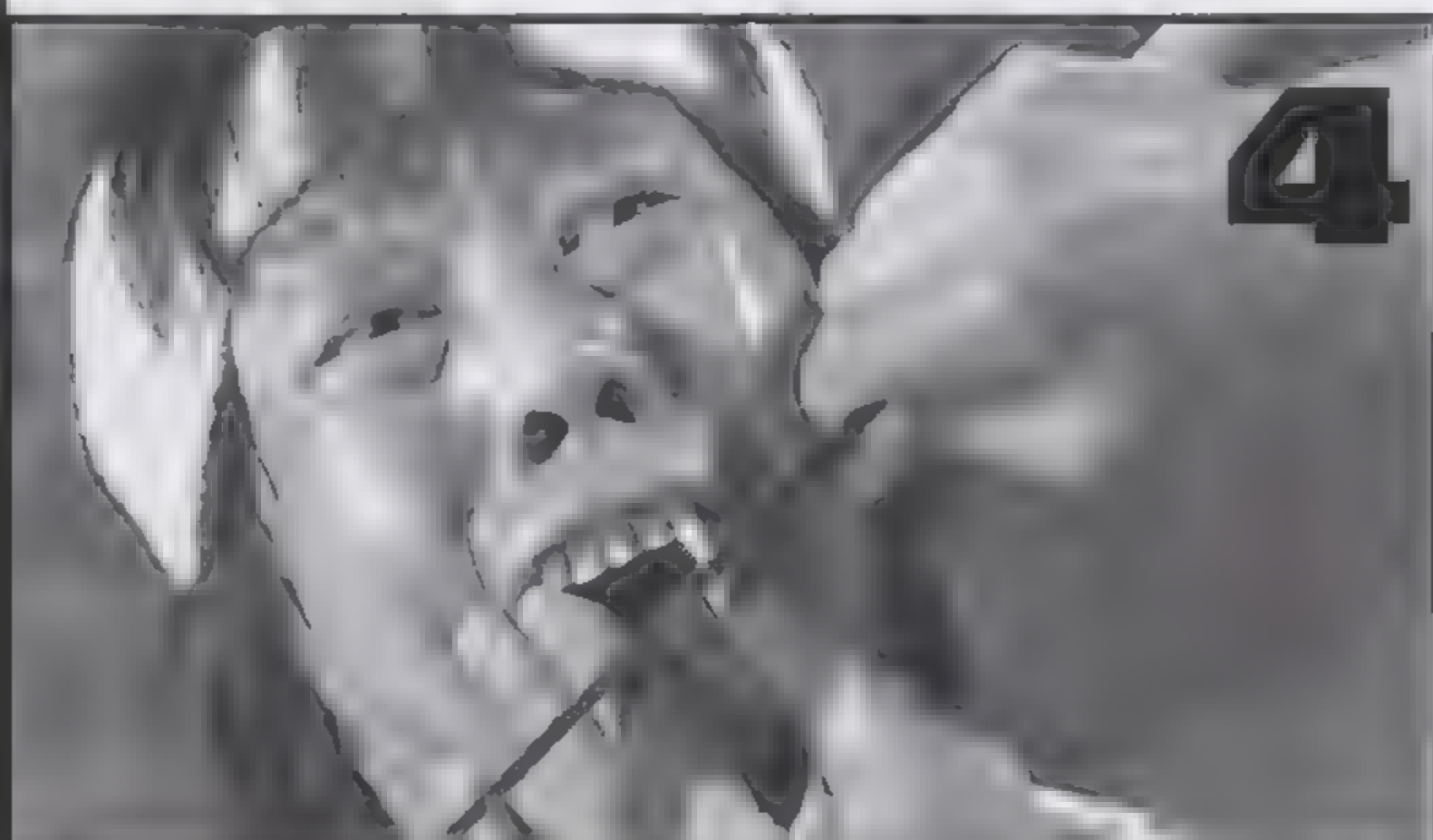




Drawn from Chinese oral histories and traditional folklore, the *jiang shi* (quite literally "stiff corpse") were a breed of vampiric spirit unlike anything previously seen in the West at the time of *Mr. Vampire*'s release. The name originated from medical science, dictated by the onset of rigor mortis in the body after death, and the reanimated corpse was believed to be only able to "hop" due to the body's rigidity. Unlike its European cousin, the *jiang shi* reanimates blind (only able to trace its victim by sensing their breath) and does not feed on blood but rather the life essence, or *qi* (chi). Feature films, such as *Mr. Vampire*, would later adopt the bloodsucking traits of the European vampire, along with a variety of more cinematic elements, to engender a livelier screen presence for their traditional monsters. Common ground between the *jiang shi* and its European counterpart were the origins of the creature itself: the final breath before death retained, suicide, a sudden or violent death, or a death where rage or unresolved business lingered post-mortem. Lau distills almost every facet mentioned into the body of his surprise hit, making for joyously entertaining viewing.

In addition to the principle *jiang shi*, director Lau and his screenwriters Roy Szeto and the late Barry Wong (1946-1991) (accompanied by input from Lau himself, producer Sammo Hung and multi-faceted entertainment icon Eric Tsang), throw in one additional supernatural element unique to Chinese cinema: the *huli jing*, or fox spirit, with the Pauline Wong's (*Her Vengeance*, 1988) character of Jade. *Huli jing*, in literature, were generally animals who could take on human form, normally that of a beautiful woman, so as to seduce human males, drawing energy from their breath. By comparison with later cinematic variations on the theme, such as *Erotic Ghost Story* (1991), *Mr. Vampire*'s fox spirit interlude between Wong and Chin Siu Ho is positively restrained. However it does give the late Lam Ching Ying's (1952-1997) Master Ko some extra duties on top of his more pressing dilemma of Yuen Wah's amok *jiang shi* and the vampiric turning of his assistant, Ricky Hui.

Which, ironically, brings us to the humor of the film (a word association *in-joke* for the uninitiated as Ricky Hui, brother to show business legends Sam and Michael, is renowned as a comedian). Horror and comedy are always a tricky mix, with most attempts biased towards one or the other, but *Mr. Vampire* achieves the balance quite nicely. It's a testament to the professionalism of all involved, especially director Lau (as this was virtually his debut feature after

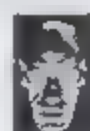


**1) Under the makeup hides martial arts icon Yuen Wah, as super vampire Yam. 2) Jade shows her true face when confronted by the Taoist ghost buster Master Ko. 3) A pillar of decay and pestilence, Yam arrives for his duel with the vampire busters. 4) Ricky Hui learns that the only thing worse than becoming a vampire is the reversion process.**

years of serving as a cinematographer), that the film maintains the balance it does as, more often than not, Chinese comedy is largely broader and more reliant on slapstick than Western humor. *Mr. Vampire* is not frightening per any measure in a contemporary sense, but it serves up its fair share of gruesome imagery amongst the many genuine laughs.

As with anything one harbors an appreciation for, there's always something new to learn with each passing year, and *Mr. Vampire*'s troubled production history, as related by Lau in an interview conducted for the Fortune Star Hong Kong DVD release of the film, not only enlightened me with new stories but endeared its legacy even further. Long having toiled as a cinematographer and with two minor films under his belt as director, Lau entailed how the subject matter of the initial screenplay spoke to him (due to an affinity with tales of the supernatural) and he requested of producer Sammo Hung to helm the film. Handed a modest budget of \$HK4.5 million and a shooting schedule of two weeks, Lau was cut loose on set for what would eventuate as his signature production. Suffice to say, the budget ballooned out to almost double, cast and crew worked non-stop in two twelve hour shifts per day, Lau was threatened with dismissal and replacement when the film ran over schedule, and near the end of shooting the financiers threatened to shut the project down and write the whole exercise off (which would have also blacklisted Lau from any further directorial work in the industry). But Ricky Lau came through, the film was rapturously received at its midnight premiere, and it went on to rank at number six in the annual Hong Kong Box Office for 1985. It also spawned three sequels, countless imitators and spin-offs, as well as a wildly popular television series.

And that, my friends, is why *Mr. Vampire* has endeared itself to me as one of my very favorite international vampire films of all time. Best of all, from recently revisiting this bona fide Hong Kong genre classic specifically for this piece, Lau's wisest call was containing his narrative in a period setting, as it has lent the film a timeless quality and it holds up just as well today as it did nearly thirty years ago. The only things that modestly date Lau's masterpiece are its heavy reliance on practical effects and old-fashioned printed opticals, as well as the sad loss of its star, Lam Ching Ying, to liver cancer in 1997. *Mr. Vampire* may have typecast Lam indelibly, but I am sure his many multi-generational fans wouldn't have it any other way, and I for one hold a heartfelt fondness for him and his place in Hong Kong cinema history. Let's face it, without master Lam and his magic talismans, peach-wood swords, sticky rice, chicken eggs and black dog's blood, the world would be overrun with hopping menaces. *Mr. Vampire* harnesses an exuberant energy and vitality, borne of folklore, uncommon in contemporary cinema, and its central themes and cultural mythology make it unique in both the annals of Chinese and horror cinema. If you've never seen it, now may be as good a time as any to track it down and open your mind to the almost surreal wonders of one of the groundbreaking trendsetters of Hong Kong cinema





# VAMPIRES OVER ISTANBUL, TOKYO, MEXICO CITY...

## ARTICLE BY DAVID WILT

By actual count (not really, I'm just making this up), 40% of all horror films made since 1990 feature vampires, 40% are about zombies, and the other 20% have demons or ghosts or demonic ghosts. Yes, we may truly be in the Golden Age of Vampire Cinema (or not, it depends upon your opinion of *Twilight*, et al.).

However this is not necessarily a new phenomenon, world cinema has always seized and expanded on popular trends. While the 1950s is considered the decade of science-fiction cinema, a closer look shows horror and fantasy films were also very much in evidence.

Many consider Hammer's *Dracula* (aka *Horror of Dracula*)—released in 1958—the harbinger of Hammer's (and its imitators') "new wave" of horror (although *Curse of Frankenstein* was actually the first of the classic Hammer series). However one should not overlook the almost simultaneous international revival of interest in supernatural horror particularly vampire movies. Films such as *El vampiro* (Mexico, 1957), *Dracula Istanbul'da* (Turkey, 1953), *El vampiro negro* (Argentina, 1953), *The Vampire* (USA, 1957), *The Return of Dracula* (USA, 1958), *Curse of the Undead* (USA, 1959), *I Vampiri* (Italy, 1956), *Onna kyuketsuki* (Japan, 1959), and *Blood of the Vampire* (UK, 1958) either predated *Horror of Dracula* or were made around the same time, and not necessarily in reaction to the British picture's success. Indeed, while several of these were not true vampire movies at all (*El vampiro negro* was a remake of Fritz Lang's *M* about a serial killer of children, and *I Vampiri* and *Blood of the Vampire* didn't feature actual vampires either), the use of the term "vampire" suggests an awareness on the part of the producers that "horror was hot."

A comparison of three of these middle-period (post-Universal and pre-Hammer) vampire films—*Dracula Istanbul'da*, *El vampiro*, and *Onna kyuketsuki*—illustrates how adaptable the vampire genre is, and how different cultures (Western, Middle Eastern, Eastern) imprint their mark on an outwardly similar theme.

The earliest of the trio, *Dracula Istanbul'da*, was more often talked about than seen outside of Turkey until recent years. It currently exists in at least two versions: one, readily available on the Internet, bears the "Sinema Turk" watermark and apparently comes from a television broadcast; adequate (if not wholly consistent or grammatical) fan-made subtitles can be obtained, making this relatively English-friendly. However, the original print of this film seems to have been in poor shape to begin with, with a fair amount of deterioration and variable image/sound quality. A slightly longer version was issued on DVD in Turkey, but has no subtitles. Rumor has it that this was an unauthorized release and apparently no extensive "restoration" was done to the print.

*Dracula Istanbul'da* was based on Ali Riza Seyfioglu's *Kazikli Voyvoda*, a Turkish "re-visioning" of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and follows the original novel rather closely. Which is not to say it's completely faithful to Stoker's book, but it is certainly a closer adaptation than the 1931 Universal film (based on a stage play freely adapted from the novel) or Hammer's later *Horror of Dracula*, which takes great liberties with the plot.

In addition to Count Dracula (played by Atif Kaptan, who appeared in over 250 Turkish movies during his long career), the analogous characters between the novel and film include lawyer Azmi (= Jonathan Harker), his wife Güzin (= Mina), Güzin's friend Sadan (= Lucy), Dr. Nuri (= Van Helsing), and Turan (= Arthur Holmwood). There is no Renfield here, although a hunchbacked servant of Dracula plays a significant and sympathetic role in the Transylvania portion of the movie, saving Azmi's life before being slain by his own master.

Director Mehmet Muhtar apparently had a rather short career as a cinema director, since IMDb lists fewer than a dozen titles to his credit, all in the 1950s. *Dracula Istanbul'da* was obviously not a big-budget production—the exterior of Dracula's "castle" is a fairly crude painting and the music sounds like "library" cues—but the sets are not risible and there is some location shooting. Muhtar's direction varies from stodgy to adequate, though it's never especially stylish, nor is the photography particularly impressive: the relatively few examples of camera movement are all the more effective for their rarity.

The film's first 36 minutes transpire in Transylvania. Azmi journeys to Dracula's castle to arrange for some real estate transactions in Istanbul. As in the novel (and Universal's *Dracula*), he is warned off by the local villagers, is picked up by a coachman who is actually Dracula, cuts his finger in front of his host (provoking a bestial reaction from the vampire), is nearly bitten by a vampire woman (driven off by Dracula, though she's mollified by the gift of an infant for her midnight snack), discovers Dracula in his coffin and attacks him with a shovel (twice!), watches Dracula scuttle down a wall, head-first, "lizard fashion," and later escapes the castle himself, but has a nervous breakdown and is hospitalized. The script of *Dracula Istanbul'da* even tosses in a version of the familiar line "Children of the night, how beautiful they sound." There is also an overt connection in the dialogue between the historical "Vlad the Impaler" (translated in the subtitles as "the Poker") and Count Dracula.

Though the action moves to modern-day Istanbul rather than England for the rest of the picture (retaining the simpler two-part structure of the 1931 screen version—in the novel, Dracula flees England and the film concludes in his homeland, where he is destroyed), many of the other events and details from the latter sections of the novel are retained. Dracula ships multiple boxes of his native soil to Istanbul and hides them in various locations around the city, Sadan is victimized by Dracula and—despite multiple blood transfusions—dies and turns into one of the undead. The film even uses Sadan's (Lucy's) "red eyes!" exclamation, the death by heart attack of her mother and newspaper accounts of attacks on children by Sadan after she's become a vampire (though no children are actually seen being victimized by the vampires, there are at least three obvious references to this practice, something Hollywood wouldn't countenance). As in the novel, a small group forms to battle Dracula: Dr. Nuri, his friend Dr. Akif, Azmi, Turan, and Güzin. Sadan is trapped by the heroes in the cemetery where her body rests, staked, and (off-screen) has her head cut off and her mouth filled with garlic.

The conclusion of *Dracula Istanbul'da* does veer away from the novel's denouement. Dracula attacks Güzin several times during the course of the picture, but never actually bites her. In an unintentionally humorous scene, Dracula corners Güzin after hours at the theatre where she performs, hypnotizes her, "magically" changes her street clothes for a diaphanous costume and has her dance for him (a piano plays by itself, though the music on the soundtrack is all strings—but hey, it's magic, right?), and then FINALLY prepares to bite her, only to be foiled by the arrival of Azmi. The conclusion is also a bit odd: Dracula runs frantically away from Azmi (what happened to "turning into a bat"?) and climbs into the last coffin of native soil he's hidden in a cemetery, where he's rather easily dispatched. Azmi uses the stake-through-the-heart and cut-off-head-fill-mouth-with-garlic remedy, which is clearly suggested though not actually shown (Azmi is shown sawing away at something in the coffin with a knife, and later see the shocked reaction of the cemetery caretaker who views the results).

*Dracula Istanbul'da* is an interesting and entertaining film, though overlong and not especially technically accomplished or artistically atmospheric. Atif Kaptan's impersonation of Count Dracula is perhaps best-known for his visible fangs (which only appear when his bloodlust is aroused). While it's unwise to claim anything is a "first," certainly *Dracula Istanbul'da* is ONE of the earliest vampire movies to show actual fangs. When the setting shifts to Istanbul, Dracula appears only sporadically and has little dialogue until the aforementioned "dance for me" scene. Sadly, the poor condition of existing copies of the movie make it all but impossible to clearly view the scene in which Dracula metamorphoses from a large bat to a bat-man to his human-like appearance. From the blurry close-up that remains, it is clear some sort of bestial mask or makeup was utilized. Otherwise, aside from Dracula suddenly "popping" into scenes, there are few special effects, and Kaptan more closely resembles a stocky, stern businessman or military officer with a receding hairline than either a suave, bloodsucking Lothario or a vicious monster.

Top-billed Annie Ball, as Güzin, performs several dance numbers during the course of the movie, and is given the full cheesecake treatment—she's shown undressing, dressing, taking a bubble bath, and so on (she's so sexy, in fact, her husband carries in his luggage a framed, full-length portrait of her in a scanty costume!).

One of the fascinating aspects of the movie is the way it adapts the familiar vampire lore to a Muslim sensibility (although modern Turkey was founded on secular principles, the population is still largely Muslim). In one of the opening scenes, Azmi checks in to a Transylvanian hotel—when he mentions his client is Count Dracula, women cross themselves (i.e., they are Christians). Azmi replies, "I have faith in my own God," and displays an amulet of some sort. However, at no point during the rest of the film is Islam (or Christianity) employed as a weapon against Dracula. Indeed, the only hints of the Muslim roots of Turkey are daily expressions used by the performers (translated as "God be with you," etc., in the subtitles).

Instead of a crucifix, to mix metaphors, garlic is the silver bullet against vampires (in fact, it's the ONLY weapon used other than the killing-stake): a garlic necklace protects Sadan and Güzin (until they each take it off, naturally), and a fistful of garlic waved at Dracula and vampire-Sadan is effective at warding them off. This culminates in the final, humorous coda of *Dracula Istanbul'da*—now that Dracula has been destroyed, Azmi orders his wife to discard all the garlic in the house, even that used for cooking!

It may seem curious, but the film actually contains little or no local color or flavor. Other than the names of the characters and the language they're speaking, *Dracula Istanbul'da* could easily be set in any Westernized society or location: France, Italy, Spain, the UK, the USA, etc.



The same largely applies to 1959's *Onna kyuketsuki* (literally, "Woman Vampire," a misleading title if there ever was one since the only "vampire" in the movie is male—it's also called "The Lady Vampire" and "Vampire Man"). Much of its "non-folkloric" tone may be attributed to the fact that this is one of Japanese cinema's first vampire films with a contemporary setting (*Kyuketsu-ga* or "Vampire Moth" predated it by 3 years but seems to have been a "fake monster" movie). Unlike the so-called *kaidan* (period ghost stories) set in feudal Japan with very distinctive costumes, settings, and social organizations, *Onna kyuketsuki* mostly takes place in a very modern, Westernized Tokyo, where young people sing "Happy Birthday" in English, police detectives and newspaper reporters strongly resemble their Hollywood counterparts, and one only catches an occasional glimpse of a kimono. However unlike *Dracula Istanbul'da*, *Onna kyuketsuki* does include several sequences with distinctively Japanese content, and the plot—not derived from Stoker's novel at all—also has roots in Japanese history and culture.

The director of *Onna kyuketsuki* was Nobuo Nakagawa, the most famous Japanese fantasy filmmaker of his era (if we set aside *kaiju* movies like *Godzilla* and thus exclude Ishiro Honda). In addition to *Vampire Moth* (an early pseudo-fantasy effort), Nakagawa's credits include *The Ghosts of Kasane Swamp* (1957), *Black Cat Mansion* (1958), *The Ghost of Yotsuya* and *The Lady Vampire* (1959), the classic *Jigoku* (Hell, 1960), and *Snake Woman's Curse* (1968). Though a number of Nakagawa's fantasy films were period pieces, he did not limit himself to this setting (nor did he only direct fantasy films, making comedies, musicals, crime films, and dramas during a long career).

Itsuko Matsumura is celebrating her birthday with her father, friends, and fiancé, reporter Tomio. The lights suddenly go out, and the "service" buzzer is heard from an upstairs room, unused for the past 20 years. Investigating, they discover Itsuko's mother Miwako, looking just as she did when she vanished, two decades before. She's in a trance and unresponsive. Later, at an art exhibition, Itsuko and Tomio spot a portrait of a woman who strongly resembles Miwako. A strange man in dark glasses approaches Itsuko when she exclaims at the coincidence, but quickly departs, followed by a dwarf. Later that night, the portrait is stolen from the gallery by the dwarf. The mysterious man—the unknown artist "Shiro Sofue" who created the painting—undergoes a painful torment when struck by moonlight: his face takes on a demonic cast, he sprouts fangs and long fingernails, then savagely murders a hotel maid who enters the room.

The next day, the stolen portrait is delivered to the Matsumura home. A sleep-walking Miwako sees it and faints. Mr. Matsumura says Miwako's family is descended from Shiro Amakusa, the leader of Japanese Christians massacred in the 17th century. 20 years earlier, Miwako and Matsumura traveled to her ancestral home on the island of Kyushu, where she vanished. Miwako recovers consciousness and finishes the story: she was abducted by "Shiro Sofue" and taken to the hidden Kisaragi Castle. He is immortal and wants her to be his mate.

In the 17th century, "Sofue"—whose real name is Takenaka—loved Princess Katsu, daughter of the Christian leader Amakusa. As troops of the Shogun approached, Katsu asked Takenaka to slay her. Drinking her blood afterwards, he became an undying vampire who attacks young women. If Miwako refuses to love him, she'll join his "hall of statues," where the bodies of scantily-clad young women, each adorned with a golden cross pendant, are on display. After 20 years of captivity, an unchanged Miwako escapes from Takenaka's castle and returns to her husband and daughter.

After testifying about the maid's murder (since her body was found in the hall near his room), Takenaka—followed by his dwarf henchman—ducks into a Ginza bar to avoid the rays of the rising moon. Coincidentally, Tomio is passing by and also enters the bar. Struck by the moonlight through an open window, Takenaka becomes the bestial vampire man once more and slays two women before dashing into the street and killing several more, then escaping. However, he leaves his sketchbook behind, and Tomio collects it. Takenaka later goes to the Matsumura house and abducts Miwako. Realizing "Shiro Sofue" and Takenaka are the same person, Tomio and Itsuko follow him to Kyushu.

With the aid of a robber who'd stumbled onto the location of Kisaragi Castle (located beneath a mountain, accessible only through a cave), Tomio, Itsuko, and the police track Takenaka to his lair. However, Itsuko is captured and nearly becomes Takenaka's latest victim before she's rescued. When part of the castle's roof collapses, Takenaka is exposed to moonlight and turns into a white-haired, horribly aged monster who then commits suicide by leaping into a pool of water. One of his mysterious retainers detonates hidden explosives, destroying the castle. Tomio, Itsuko, and the police escape, but Miwako—who had joined the "hall of statues"—is buried under the rubble with Takenaka and the others.

As with *Dracula Istanbul'da*, the familiar oppositional status of Christianity and vampirism is oddly twisted in *Onna kyuketsuki*, also produced in a "non-Christian" society. Rather than being repelled by a cross, Takenaka actually uses it as a talisman. His "origin story" is rooted in the actual Shimabara Rebellion of the 1630s, when Japanese Catholics revolted against unfair treatment by the shogunate; Shiro Amakusa was a real individual, though presumably his daughter wasn't killed by a young man who loved her and who later turned into a vampire by drinking her blood. The flashback scenes to the rebellion prominently display a large stone cross, and the rebel banners also bear a cross symbol.

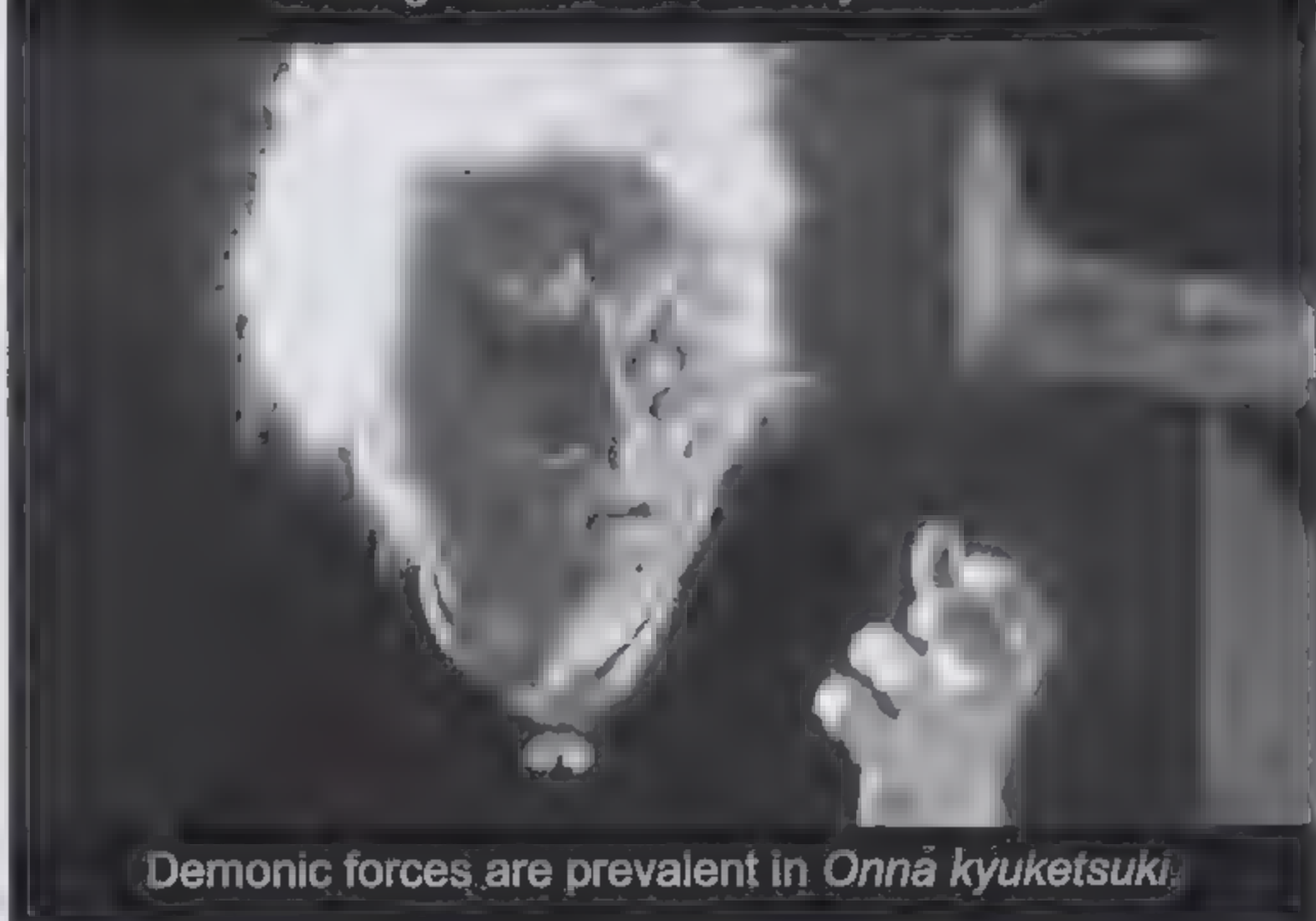
Although Christianity is not, as such, stigmatized in *Onna kyuketsuki* as the reason for Takenaka's vampirism, the fact he uses a cross to mark for death the women who refuse to love him seems significant. In this movie, it's not the vampire who recoils from the sign of the cross, it's his potential victims.



Poster art for *Dracula Istanbul'da*.



A biting scene from *Onna kyuketsuki*.



Demonic forces are prevalent in *Onna kyuketsuki*.





Several images from *Onna kyuketsuki*  
(aka *The Lady Vampire*).

*Onna kyuketsuki* does not contain much standard vampire lore at all, in fact. Takenaka functions normally in the daytime, fearing moonlight rather than sunshine. The movie was based on a novel by Tachibana Sotoo, who may have conflated vampires and werewolves. The Shimabara Rebellion sequence does include a reference to the "full moon" so perhaps Takenaka's metamorphosis is related to this anniversary—his final manifestation is also puzzling, though perhaps it's the PROLONGED moonlight that turns him into an elderly monster. He can't change into a bat or anything of that sort, and his supernatural powers seem limited to hypnotism (and immortality, though there is no suggestion he's immune to bullets or such, since he flees from Tomio when the latter seizes a sword).

Unfortunately, one of the weakest parts of *Onna kyuketsuki* is the prolonged and awkward conclusion, which is not only shot and edited poorly—Takenaka and Tomio have a clumsy running battle as Itsuko dodges the vampire's other henchmen, including the dwarf, an old woman, and a muscular bald guy—but also concludes in a confusing manner (the pool Takenaka walks into seems about three feet deep and its fatal properties are not explained).

Shigeru Amachi, who plays the vampiric Takenaka, was only 28 years old when he appeared in *Onna kyuketsuki*. He later worked in director Nakagawa's *The Ghost of Yotsuya* and *Jigoku*. One of his final screen appearances was as Paul Naschy's co-star in *The Beast and the Magic Sword* (1983). As Takenaka, Amachi is appropriately cool and imperious in his human persona, tormented when struck by the rays of the moon, and extremely bestial and savage in his vampire state (again, acting almost more like a werewolf than the suave, romantic neck-biting vampire we're used to).

*Onna kyuketsuki* is less than 80 minutes long, but the production values are quite satisfactory, aside from several highly noticeable, grainy stock shots of warriors in the flashback sequence. Japan's film industry had been established for many years and was technically quite accomplished, lending a polished veneer to its productions which is absent in a picture such as *Dracula Istanbul'da* (even taking into account the poor quality of existing copies of the latter). Filmed in the widescreen Shintohoscope process, much of *Onna kyuketsuki* appears to have been shot on location or standing sets, while a few of the sequences seem deliberately minimalist, one or two pieces of furniture and the actors against a black background, perhaps to enhance the dream-like quality of the content. The film was released several years ago on a Japanese DVD with optional English subtitles.

The other notable "third-world" vampire film of this period was *El vampiro*, one of the seminal films of Mexican cinema's horror cycle of the late 1950s-early 1960s. With virtually no previous Mexican models, director Fernando Méndez and screenwriter Ramón Obón drew heavily from foreign sources—particularly Hollywood films—setting the pattern for numerous Mexican vampire movies that followed.

The Mexican film industry had grown significantly during the 1930s and 1940s, and by the 1950s had reached a significant level of technical expertise. *El vampiro* is an extremely stylish and well-made film, and received extensive international distribution during its initial release. Thanks to the English-dubbed version produced by K. Gordon Murray, *El vampiro* remained accessible on television and video for decades. The original film (with English subtitles rather than dubbed dialogue) finally got a welcome release on DVD from Mondo Macabro in the UK and CasaNegra in the USA in the 2000s.

It is no exaggeration to say *El vampiro* was far more interesting, accomplished, and influential than either *Dracula Istanbul'da* or *Onna kyuketsuki*, and not simply because it was more widely seen. Neither the Turkish nor the Japanese movie is considered much more than a curiosity piece, whereas *El vampiro* was ranked #35 on the list of the all-time best Mexican movies (of any genre), and is consistently mentioned in the pantheon of classic horror films.



Marta, who's been summoned to assist her ailing aunt María Teresa, and traveling salesman Enrique travel to the isolated hacienda "Los Sicomóros" in the Sierra Negra region of Mexico. When they arrive, Marta's uncle Emilio and aunt Eloísa say María Teresa just died. Although Eloísa is apparently the same age as the elderly Emilio, she appears young and attractive: in a pre-credits sequence, she's attacked by a vampire, so the audience knows she's one of the undead. Her assailant was Count Duval, a foreign nobleman who lives nearby. 100 years before, Duval's vampire brother was killed and buried at "Los Sicomóros," and now Duval wants to take control of the hacienda, revive his brother using soil from their native land (which, as the film opens, arrives in a coffin shipped from Hungary), and avenge himself on the inhabitants of the region.

Eloísa tries to convince Marta to sell her share in the estate to Duval, but Marta refuses. Duval attacks Marta, drinking her blood, but María Teresa—still alive, sheltered by the loyal servants—helps protect her niece. Enrique, actually a doctor summoned to the hacienda by Emilio, saves Marta after she's poisoned by Eloísa; María Teresa later kills Eloísa to save Marta. However, Marta is abducted by Duval, and if she's bitten by him a second time, she'll also become a vampire. Enrique battles Duval to save her: at daybreak Duval has to take refuge in his coffin, where María Teresa finds him and drives a stake through his heart.

*El vampiro* has some serious flaws. Count Duval is off-screen most of the time—after the pre-credits sequence, he doesn't appear until 20 minutes have elapsed, and only sporadically thereafter until the climax—and there are too many long dialogue scenes between Enrique and Marta. The plot has several glaring holes: if Eloísa is a vampire (and has been one for **years**, apparently), why doesn't anyone in the household notice she's never around during the day? How does the frail María Teresa overcome Eloísa so easily at the climax? Why does Duval—a supernatural being who can turn into a bat and walk through walls—use a sword in his climactic struggle with Enrique? These deficiencies are more than offset, however, by the assured direction of Fernando Méndez, the superb photography of Rosalío Solano, and noted artist Gunther Gerszo's excellent production design (although Gustavo César Carrón's score is slightly too bombastic). María Teresa's funeral is an impressive, visually striking sequence, and the entire film is suffused with an eerie, brooding atmosphere.

Making his film debut as the vampire count was Spanish actor Germán Robles. Duval wears the standard Dracula-issue formal evening clothes and cape, sleeps in a coffin, changes into a bat (the major technical flaw in the film, Mexican movie fake-bats are HORRIBLE), and casts no reflection (Eloísa's lack of a reflection precipitates Marta's discovery her aunt is a vampire). However, in a departure from Hollywood tradition, Duval actually exposes his fangs, a la *Dracula Istanbul'da*. If any film influenced Hammer's *Horror of Dracula*, it may have been *El vampiro*, since not only does Christopher Lee sport elongated canines like Count Duval, but at the end of the Mexican film, Eloísa's corpse rapidly ages and becomes a skeleton, a feat repeated (much more effectively, one must admit) in the British movie.

Robles is suave and menacing, and Carmen Montejo is quite good as his sensuous assistant, the traitorous Eloísa. On the other hand, producer-star Abel Salazar—known primarily for his roles in romantic comedies—makes an inappropriately jocular and rather inept hero. After all, it is the elderly María Teresa who subdues Eloísa and stakes Duval!

*El vampiro* occupies a curious middle ground between *Dracula Istanbul'da*'s relatively faithful adaptation of Stoker's novel and *Onna kyuketsuki*'s seemingly confused understanding of vampire legend. The standard literary (and Hollywood) vampire tropes are in place, as are a few snatches of the *Dracula* plot (the boxes of soil sent from Eastern Europe, for instance), but the storyline is largely original. In fact, with its emphasis on family intrigue in an insular setting, attempts to force a young woman to renounce her inheritance, mysteries in an old, isolated mansion, etc., it more closely resembles a Gothic romance.

In contrast to both *Dracula Istanbul'da* and *Onna kyuketsuki*, *El vampiro* was produced by not only a "Christian" nation, but one with a heavily Catholic population. Thus, the religious imagery associated with vampire films is in full bloom here. Crucifixes abound (and do repel vampires), as well as scapulars (religious pictures worn about one's neck), people "crossing" themselves, prayers, and so forth.

Hundreds and hundreds of vampire films have been made around the world in more than 100 years of cinema history. Some are traditional, others attempt to break new ground, but each reflects the time and place of its production, and each was influenced by previous variations on the same topic. *Dracula Istanbul'da*, *El vampiro*, and *Onna kyuketsuki* are three good examples of this: each movie contains familiar ideas and images, but each is also a unique product of a different national cinema.

LA ESCALOFRIANTE HISTORIA DE UN REYER MUERTE QUE CADA  
ANTIDISTINGUIA A LA VIDA EN BUSCA DE LA SANGRE DE SUS  
VICTIMAS SIGUIENDO AL EL DICTADO SUPREMO DE SU  
MALITO DESTINO



1. 1950-1951  
2. 1952-1953

ABEL SALAZAR - ARIADNE WELTER  
CARMEN MONTEJO - JOSE LUIS JIMENEZ

EN

# EL VAMPIRO

con GERMAN ROBLES

Originalmente y Adaptación por FERNANDO MENDÉZ  
Fotografía ROSALÍO SOLANO Música GUSTAVO CÉSAR CARRÓN

Director FERNANDO MENDÉZ



# SEX, FOOD, DEATH AND RELIGION: JEAN ROLLIN'S ARCHAIC MODERNITY

By BRYAN L. YEATTER

Freud must have loved vampires. With respect to human preoccupation, they may cover the turf—sex, food, death, religion—but the emphasis with vampires has always been predominantly on sex. Considering the ways in which he could insinuate sex into every imaginable object and circumstance, Freud surely salivated over the possibilities vampires offered in the pursuit of obsession. Then again, maybe it was too easy; Freud liked finding orgasms in places most people wouldn't bother looking, and when it comes to sex, vampires never had anybody fooled. Forever stamped with metaphor vampires have always been the sexual predators of stage, screen, and literature. Authors of fiction beware: should you take on a vampire story, the whole world will presume to know all of your dirty little secrets. Through the years, the world has been made aware that Bram Stoker was married to a frigid woman who wouldn't come across in the bedroom, and so he acted out when putting pen to paper. At least, that's the revisionists' take. The byproduct was Count Dracula, a character that would eventually through film come to represent the stereotype of the male vampire as a suave, supernatural gigolo able to bend women to his will. It was quite a departure from the penny dreadful *Varney the Vampire*, who had more the appearance of a creepy pervert, but particularly with Bela Lugosi's portrayal of Dracula as an eccentric Eastern European sophisticate, vampires crawled out of the gutter and ascended to the status of supernatural nobility.

Then there was that hypnotic stare employed by Lugosi; he could apparently make women swoon by glaring at them, and weirdly at that. We all love Lugosi, but it seems amusing in retrospect that his performance would have been so frightening in its day. Perhaps because it has been caricatured so much through the years, it now seems vaguely clownish, but of course we need to be mindful of the times. We should remember that there was an era when filmmakers could scarcely hint at what lay beneath the surface, and only through certain intimations could the audience be led to that place of forbidden knowledge.

By the latter 1960s things were considerably different, of course. There was a new permissiveness that allowed filmmakers the freedom to indulge in more openly portraying things that had long been off-limits. Among others, Hammer Films sought to cash in on this new libertine wave, but the truth is that some filmmakers were ill suited to it, and even seemed somehow intimidated by this emerging freedom. The results were often awkward and self-conscious; one can almost imagine Roy Ward Baker sitting in his director's chair, hand firmly clasped over his eyes as Ingrid Pitt and Madeleine Smith chased each other naked and giggling around the bedroom in *The Vampire Lovers* (1970).

And then there was Christopher Lee's Dracula. It is fairly ridiculous that Lee's interpretation of the role would be considered to have exceeded Lugosi's to any significant degree as far as its libidinous underpinnings. Like Lugosi, Lee held the same magnetic power over women by virtue of a glowering stare, more silly than anything else, and he never seemed to alter expression much. Whether staring down Van Helsing or preparing to dig into a woman's jugular he always looked rather like he was going to brain someone with a ten-pound hammer. What woman could resist?

The expanded perimeter that filmmakers had to operate in turned out to be trickier than one might have thought, forcing them to navigate uncharted territory in which lesser talents might stumble helplessly into either sophomoric giggle fits or simple vulgarity. Richard Blackburn did a fantastic job on *Lemora—Lady Dracula* (1973), as did Jose Larraz with *Vampyres* (1974), but when it came to capturing both the erotic and surrealist potential of the subject, no filmmaker could match French director Jean Rollin.



Original poster for  
*The Rape of the Vampire* (1968)

It is interesting that, given the apparent ease and mastery with which Rollin wove eroticism into his films, it was by his own account forced on him by the financiers of his initial effort, 1968's *The Rape of the Vampire*. The surrealism, however, was entirely his doing, and something that did not particularly please his backers. But Rollin understood that supernatural concepts had to necessarily be dealt with in a decidedly unnatural fashion; the same rules of logic shouldn't—in fact, *couldn't*—apply. His work was frequently unencumbered by the genre's most stifling clichés, as he intuitively understood that in dealing with the supernatural it was best not to tether the story so firmly to the natural. In a medium equal parts visual and narrative, Rollin obviously favored the former and his narratives were sometimes loose to the point of merely serving to link some wonderful and striking imagery. For that reason, his films frequently had a dreamlike flow that was well suited to the unreality of the subject matter, and imbued the work with an unnerving dissonance. While other films were typically having the vampire enter and disrupt the normal world of the protagonists, Rollin knew that it was far more disconcerting to drop the protagonists into the weird environment where vampires dwell.

But more than that, Rollin's vampires seemed to have creepy all sewn up. The vampire-sex analogy had

solidified the stereotype of the debonair but cruel male and the voluptuous and seductive female, but Rollin's vampires often had none of that going for them. They also lacked that superhuman strength other vampires seemed to possess—you know, the ability to fling men across a room with the flick of a wrist. True to its title, *The Rape of the Vampire* included among its bizarre characters a female vampire who had been gang-raped by a mob of angry villagers. Rollin's vampires were often little more than scarecrows—pale, sickly weaklings. Whereas other vampires may have been sexual predators, Rollin's were frequently incapable of such initiative, coming across rather as mere parasites. They were pallid, mirthless, and often forlorn; in short, they were dead, yet not quite—they were *undead*. They were like relics of a bygone era, clinging to a tenuous existence, inhabiting equally archaic buildings that seemed so out of place amid the modern world that came intruding. *Nobody* did vampires like Jean Rollin.

*The Rape of the Vampire* was an awkward beginning for Rollin. Shot in black and white, the film was presented in two parts, which Rollin later explained as being a tip of the hat to the old American serials he enjoyed in his youth. Upon viewing the film, one could easily believe that he simply ran out of ideas thirty minutes in and then shifted gears with a whole new storyline. That much was atypical of his subsequent work, but certain other Rollin templates would emerge.

In the film's opening segment, a man named Thomas (identified as a psychoanalyst) travels to a remote country manor with two assistants. They are seeking out four sisters, whom the locals believe to be 200-year-old vampires. The sisters are themselves persuaded of it, but of course Thomas believes that they are deluded and the villagers merely superstitious. Certain that the women are being misled and victimized by the elderly lord of the manor, who does hold considerable sway over them, Thomas is determined

to free the sisters from his control. Ultimately, he fails in his efforts, and it is Thomas himself who winds up reversing field and changing his mind. As an angry mob closes in to kill the women, Thomas declares his love for one of the sisters and asks her to inflict the vampire's kiss on him, which she does. The segment ends with Thomas and his vampire lover fleeing to a nearby beach where they are gunned down and appear to die.

The second act begins on the same beach as the *Queen of the Vampires*—played with a Saturday matinee bravado appropriate to an homage to the old serials—arrives by boat with her strange entourage. It turns out that the lord of the manor was merely a servant of the Queen, and the sisters were part of a somewhat nondescript scheme she had. Back in the city, the vampire Queen has set up shop in a clinic, acquiring the services of a doctor in trying to reanimate corpses so that she might have an army of slaves under her command. The doctor goes along with it all since he is in love with one of the female vampires in the Queen's group, but on the side he has been researching a way to cure his lover of what he sees as a mere affliction. That suits Thomas fine, as he and his own vampire girlfriend are still alive and also eager to be cured. Alas, this one ends well for no one.





Although certainly fascinating, the film cannot be judged an unqualified success. It so perfectly mimics the pretensions of French surrealist cinema that it often plays like a caricature, and the acting frequently crosses the threshold of parody (in fact, some of the actors seem to be trying to out-buffoon each other). Still, it does have its moments. Rollin's seeming disinterest in narrative structure is already evident, as is his artistic eye for visual composition and his preoccupation with landscapes, and interesting places and structures. In fact, the film opens with a shot of a rather unique-looking tree, and Rollin at one point throws up a fairly pointless montage of the exterior of the manor seen from varied angles. Ordinarily, one might consider it no more than a simple transitional shot if not for the camera's seeming reluctance to leave it.

Rollin worked differently, unbound by conventions. When he saw anything that caught his eye and struck him as interesting—a building, a place, a tree—he sought to incorporate it, sometimes fashioning little moments specifically around it. While making one of his later films, *Two Orphan Vampires* (1997), he would daily drive past an iron gateway and was struck by its utter pointlessness. The tall, gated entryway was bordered by concrete columns on either side, and the structure stood alone with no connecting partition; even stranger was the fact that it opened to absolutely nothing, merely standing in front of an empty field. Its very elaborateness begged some manse appear to give it purpose, but there it stood, entirely without reason. It might as well have been a gateway to another dimension. Rollin couldn't resist concocting a moment, however brief, to capture this wonderfully isolated and useless structure.

Rollin's follow-up to *Rape* was *The Nude Vampire* (1969), an interestingly-crafted piece of pop culture/comic book absurdity that would have seemed entirely insincere had it come from any era other than the late-sixties. An entertaining amalgam of fantasy, intrigue, sex, sci-fi, surrealism and art deco flamboyance, the story is centered on a beau monde cabal headed by a man named Radamante, which is holding a beautiful vampire woman captive. They are engaged in studying her blood in order to try and discover just what keeps her looking so young—yeah, the old mad scientist's dream of discovering the secret to immortality. In order to feed her Radamante's group enters into an arrangement with a cult that worships the girl as a deity and willingly sacrifices its own members to her. At their gatherings, the group chooses a member to serve as the vampire's food, and everything seems to be going just fine until Radamante's son Pierre gets curious about what his father is up to and crashes one of the ceremonies. Fearing exposure, Radamante has the girl spirited away to a remote chateau, but having seen the fetching vampire, Pierre can't help falling in love with her and he follows after. The film's only real fault is that it punks out in concluding, veering off into some netherworld beachscape where the vampires (who prefer to be called mutants, by the way) wait for the day when they will inherit the earth through evolution. Otherwise, things were just fine up till then.

Among the film's more interesting aspects are the costumes worn by some of the members of the suicide cult, who go stalking about in black tights and animal head masks. Add in a superbly discordant musical score and the outrageously sexy Castel twins in outfits amusingly ridiculous enough to make Lady Gaga insane with jealousy, and you would have to be a real stoic not to enjoy.

Ah, the Castel twins, Marie-Pierre and Catherine. Was there ever anyone who could pout so well as those two wonderful little hussies? Although Catherine Castel would drift from sight for a few films, Marie-Pierre became a fixture in Rollin's successive films. She would be among a



One sheet for  
*The Nude Vampire* (1969).

number of cast members from *The Nude Vampire* to return in Rollin's next work, *The Shiver of the Vampires* (1970).

Outwardly more conventional than its predecessors, *Shiver* is perhaps not coincidentally Rollin's most consistent effort up to then. The story concerns a pair of newlyweds named Antoine and Isle who are embarking on their honeymoon and decide to stop along the way and pay a visit to Isle's only living relatives, two weird cousins who live in the family's ancestral castle.

Not having seen them since childhood, Isle is excited to pay her cousins a visit, but when she and her husband arrive in the village near the castle they are told by the locals that Isle's cousins have recently died and were only that day laid to rest. The young couple press on to the castle, where they are taken in and given a room by the two female servants there, but Isle requests separate rooms. The shock of learning of the death of her cousins has thrown a wet blanket on her mood, and she is hardly wanting to proceed with consummating the marriage under such circumstances. As she undresses for bed that night, Isle is startled when the room's grandfather clock swings open like a coffin at the stroke of midnight and a pale, waif-like woman emerges. The woman, Isolde, is a vampire, and she first seduces Isle, then leads her outside to a nearby cemetery for a midnight ceremony.

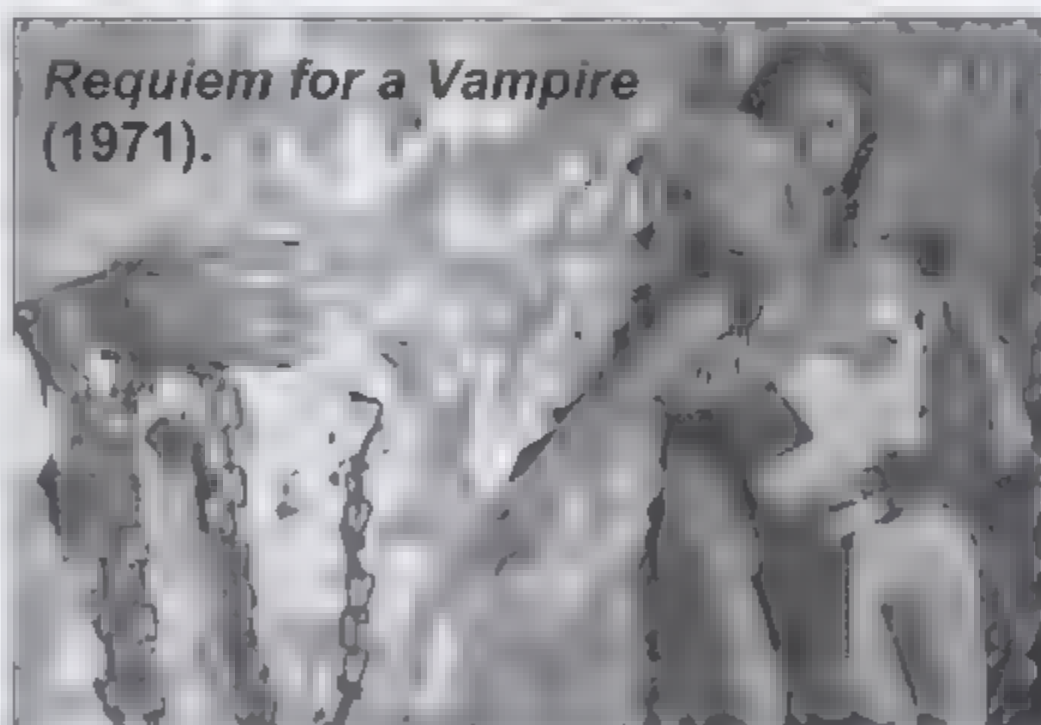
The following day the couple is shocked to be greeted by Isle's cousins, who explain that the villagers, either through ignorance or cruelty, have misinformed them regarding their alleged deaths. Sure enough, the two men appear to be alive and well, but it eventually comes to light that they are only partly so. Once fearless slayers of vampires, the two would routinely go out hunting the undead, returning the following day covered in blood and drunk from the kill. But alas, they eventually fell victim to their quarry, and were themselves doomed to become that which they had so ruthlessly tried to destroy.

Wanting to see their family line continue, the two men are eager to father a child, but as Isolde has killed the one woman who seemed very willing to bear offspring to either or both of them, they now see their cousin Isle as their best opportunity. Day

after day, Antoine tries to convince his bride to leave the castle, but as she becomes more and more listless and bedridden, she declines to leave her cousins. She also pines for Isolde, at one point opening the grandfather clock from which she originally appeared, hoping to find her there. Seeing the interior empty, Isle closes it again and then stands naked, embracing the clock longingly.

It would seem that happy resolutions were not within Rollin's temperament, as this one also ends with no winners. The film is uncharacteristically wordy for Rollin, with Isle's two flamboyant cousins—looking like aging swingers plucked from a Paris nightclub, part Goth, part psychedelic—delivering a number of lengthy lectures, tutoring the newlyweds on the history of religion, and then later relating their own exploits, first as vampire hunters, then as unwilling fellow travelers with the undead. As with all of Rollin's works, the film is visually arresting. The castle, tall and fascinatingly narrow, is certainly interesting, the furnishings frequently covered in furs and the walls displaying the occasional abstract art along with all of the torches and skulls that are arranged with such care, an odd mixture of the very old with the modern.

Rollin's films were all unique in their own way, and other than its narrative coherence, what most sets *Shiver* apart from its predecessors is the meandering rock music score, frequently interesting, but occasionally inappropriate and intrusive. Otherwise the film is noteworthy for its camerawork, fluid, then static in turns. Rollin seemed in a frisky mood, more than once having the camera perform a 360-degree revolution, with each character delivering their lines as the camera makes its pass by them. In another scene it was the actors who were forced to provide the motion, as the camera remains stationary and Isle's two bizarre cousins each stick their mug in front of it in turns to deliver their lines. It would almost seem that Rollin was uncomfortable with the long stretches of dialogue, and was seeking some way to make things visually interesting through those moments. If he were experiencing discomfort over dialogue, he would deal with it easily enough next time out by keeping it minimal, with superb results.



Rollin's steady improvement from one film to the next would find him reaching the plateau with his fourth feature, 1971's *Requiem for a Vampire*, a too infrequently acknowledged landmark in the genre. It was here that Rollin's narrative ambiguity was at its most unsettling. As semi-coherent as a disturbed, haunting dream, *Requiem* is a sublime, debauched fairy tale—Bob Guccione meets the Brothers Grimm.

Barely lucid from its opening shot, the film shows little interest in explanations, beginning with two young women in full clown makeup and attire, firing pistols from the shattered rear windshield of a car as it pulls away. What follows is a fairly low-speed car chase through a winding country road, as the women continue to exchange fire with the vehicle behind them. They manage to elude their pursuers, despite their driver being mortally wounded, and when he expires, the two girls douse both car and driver with gasoline and set them ablaze before wandering off into the countryside.





*Lips of Blood* (1975).

Their journey gets weirder by the moment (including being nearly buried alive by two drunken cemetery workers after stumbling into an open grave at dusk), until the girls eventually wind up taking refuge in an old castle they come across. Although it bears traces of occupancy (torches and candles burn everywhere), the girls initially find no one around, and discover a soft bed to pass the night. But as they enjoy each other's company in bed (yes, meaning *that*), they are disturbed by sounds coming from somewhere within the castle, and they take up their pistols and go to investigate. They find that they are hardly alone, and after the girls interrupt a somewhat androgynous, fanged woman playing an organ for an audience of robed skeletons, the weird characters begin appearing from every corner. Fleeing the castle, the girls are chased by three brutish men and two women, who catch up with them in a nearby cemetery.

The girls are about to be seized by their pursuers when everything is brought to a halt by the emergence of a stately figure from a mausoleum, a tall, gaunt, fanged man—obviously a vampire—who mesmerizes the girls and leads the entire group down into his sepulcher. Once inside, a sadistic orgy ensues; there are a number of nude women chained to the walls, and they are groped, mauled, and eventually raped by the men and women from the castle while the tall vampire busies himself with the two fugitive girls. Discerning that they are virgins, the vampire refuses to let the others have them, and instead announces his intention to initiate them into the group. Until that happens, the girls are instructed to lure victims to the castle for the others.

Upon awaking in the castle the next day, the two girls decide to take the opportunity to flee; their attempts to escape prove futile, however, for no matter which direction they run, they ultimately wind up back at the castle. Looking at a future of ritualistic murder, blood drinking, and bestial sex, things look pretty bleak for the girls. It happens that the tall vampire from the mausoleum is the last of his kind, and the five people from the castle are initiates, twisted and savage individuals who long to become vampires themselves, and therefore continue to bring victims to the cemetery to satisfy their master. Ultimately, the vampire himself pulls the plug on the entire enterprise.

It is interesting that the vampire proves the moralist of the bunch. Acknowledging that he is too ancient to exert the power he once had, he tells one of the girls, "Soon, all of this will be gone." He seems to find the behavior of his devoted followers distasteful, and fesses up to his reason for indulging them in their sadistic revelries. "They give me the illusion of being alive," he says. But, of course, they are only using him as well, and he knows it. His only relevance, it appears, is his continued worth to a handful of miscreants. In the end, he decides to take one of his female followers into his tomb and stay put for good. "Never again will we leave this tomb," he explains. "There will be no more crime and bloodshed."

Following *Requiem*, Rollin was persuaded to leave his comfort zone and try his hand at something other than vampires; as a result, he produced two of his most interesting features in *The Iron Rose* (1973) and *Demoniacs* (1974). He also drifted into directing pornography with titles like *Schoolgirl Hitchhikers* and *Fly Me the French Way*—hey, he had to make a living. Considering how his films had already come to skirt the boundaries of pornography, it might not have seemed that drastic a plunge, but Rollin was apparently ashamed of it—enough so that he directed the films under the nom de plume Michel Gentil. He seems also to have been embarrassed by the process of making the films; Brigitte Lahaie, a porn actress who would go on to also work for Rollin in some of his later horror films, would recall Rollin leaving the room when it came time to film the sex scenes. The director excusing himself? At such a crucial moment? After all, what is a porno film without its sex scenes? Then again, perhaps in such instances a director merely has to trust professionals to do their job and know that they will, uh, hit their mark without prompting.

But Rollin could not stay away from vampires. When he did return to the genre, there was nothing for him but to pull back and change direction with his next feature. Trying to match the surrealism of *Requiem* would be redundant; trying to surpass it would likely result in a work that would be incomprehensible. For that reason, *Lips of Blood* (1975) would be a far more ordinary work, though it too would set itself apart from the pack.

More focused and structured than its predecessors, *Lips of Blood* follows the efforts of a man named Frederic to uncover a mystery from his childhood. While attending a chichi party in Paris, Frederic is struck by a photo display depicting the ruins of an old castle, and it awakens a childhood memory of passing a night in those same ruins as a twelve-year-old boy. Having gotten lost after dark, Frederic had come upon the ruins and was invited in by a beautiful teenage girl, who let him rest there and then woke him to leave before dawn. Frederic recalls being infatuated with the girl as a child, and he becomes determined to rediscover the ruins.

Upon visiting the photographer who took the photo, Frederic initially finds her less than forthcoming. In fact, she tells him that she has been paid well to refrain from divulging anything about the ruins to him, but she doesn't take much prodding. Saying that she will reveal what she knows, she asks Frederic to meet her at midnight, but when he arrives that night at their point of rendezvous, Frederic finds the photographer dead, and is then chased through the streets by her killer. Frederic's life is spared by the intervention of four beautiful vampire women, who seem determined to guide him toward his goal.

All along, Frederic has also been seeing apparitions of the girl from the ruins, beckoning him to return. When he eventually arrives there, he is met by his mother, who tells him the whole story. The beautiful girl that he remembers so fondly is actually a vampire, and more than that, one that was responsible for killing Frederic's father. Imprisoned in the ruins by Frederic's mother, the girl has been summoning Frederic to come and free her. Frederic's mother had been desperately trying to prevent him from pursuing his obsession with the memory, but once he is there, she unwisely leaves it to him to do away once and for all with the vampire. He chooses instead to allow her to make a vampire of him, and the film concludes with the two lovers climbing naked into a coffin on the beach and allowing the tide to carry them away to their own private island. Being vampires, it isn't clear where their blood supply will come from in their idyllic, isolated paradise.

Through its first half, the story plays like some sort of espionage thriller more than anything else, and while it finds more familiar footing after Frederic finally arrives at the ruins in the latter stretch, *Lips of Blood* soon enough loses itself, collapsing into wanton sentimentality. In one way, Rollin's take on vampires began to lose its individuality. Sexy vampire women were flooding the market, and rather than continue marching to his own drumbeat, Rollin seemed compelled to merely follow along. His vampire women, once so unique, were now falling in line; no longer odd and emaciated, they were now as shapely and robust as their female victims. There is nothing creepy about a beautiful girl, even if she does have sharp teeth. Beneath it all, *Lips of Blood* was really just a syrupy love story, which was hardly Rollin's strength.

Rollin drifted for a prolonged stretch into more pornography before reestablishing his career with a string of fascinating horror features, among them *The Living Dead Girl* (1982), marginally a vampire film. In 1978 Rollin had made *The Grapes of Death*, credited with being the first French gore film, and by the time of *Dead Girl*, he was apparently still giddy on gore. The film is set in the Chateau Valmont, where Catherine Valmont, two years dead, has been resting in her coffin in the family vault beneath the chateau. As the estate is unoccupied and up for sale, some nearby workers have been using it as a toxic waste dump, clandestinely depositing barrels of chemicals in the vaults. But when one of the barrels spills, the seepage somehow manages to revive Catherine Valmont, who emerges from her coffin with an insatiable lust for blood.

The executor of the estate is Helene, Catherine's closest friend since childhood, when they swore loyalty to one another with a blood oath. When Helene arrives at the chateau one evening, she is shocked to find it littered with bloody corpses, and doubly shocked at finding Catherine apparently alive, although she is nude, covered with blood, and seemingly deranged. Feeling that she has been misled into believing that Catherine had died, Helene devotedly cleans up after her friend, then seeks to care for her. After becoming aware of Catherine's bloodlust, Helene initially takes to cutting herself in order to allow Catherine to feed from her body, but when the idea of continuing to do so becomes impractical, she takes the drastic step of luring victims to the chateau and shutting them up in the vault, where Catherine punctures their throats with her fingernails and drinks their blood.

Eventually, Catherine becomes lucid enough to realize how monstrous she has become, and she pleads with her friend to end her life. "Help me!" she cries, "I am evil!" But it is Helene who proves most evil. While Catherine's behavior is a matter of a perverse and uncontrollable urge, Helene makes a calculated decision, clinging to her friend even if it means an endless stream of murders. Helene abducts a girl from the village, and after bringing her to the vault and binding her slashes her stomach in an attempt to entice Catherine into feeding. Catherine refuses, protesting, "No more deaths! No more crimes! No more blood!" She ends up savagely killing Helene, but just as the film offered no explanation for Catherine's revival, it also gives no solution to her predicament, concluding



with her again covered in blood and wailing over the mauled corpse of her friend.

While conceptually interesting, the film is impossible to take seriously; a victim of its own excess, the over-the-top and cartoonish gore make it play like a feeble Grand Guignol parody. The gore is so unconvincing, in fact, that it only serves to contradict the earnest efforts of the principal cast members. There are also two American tourists to contend with, their frequent intrusions into the story being both unnecessary and annoying to the point that one longs to see them killed: unfortunately, that doesn't occur until the film is very near its end. While it held much promise, *The Living Dead Girl* was ultimately done in by Rollin's inability to moderate.

Though he would not make another vampire film until 1997, Rollin had hardly abandoned the subject in the interim. It was a series of novels he had written that served as the source material for *Two Orphan Vampires*, a work that showed flashes of Rollin's old style, yet saw him surrender to convention more than ever.

The film is centered on two blind orphans who, unbeknownst to the nuns who care for them, are actually vampires. Blind by day, the girls are able to see at night, and regularly sneak out of the orphanage for nocturnal frolics through a nearby cemetery, as well as scoring the odd victim or two. The nuns arrange for the girls to be taken in by a renowned eye doctor in the hope that he will be able to discern the reason for their blindness and find a cure. Once in the doctor's home, the girls continue with their nightly forays (it seems everybody lives within spitting distance of a graveyard), but eventually feel stifled enough under his governance to seek their freedom by killing their benefactor. Though the girls meet an unhappy end, having memories all along of past incarnations, they know that they will return.

*Two Orphan Vampires* accomplishes something Rollin had never managed through the highs and lows of his career: simply put, the film is a crashing bore. It's like treading through molasses; there are no grand moments to applaud, no startling images seared into memory. The best Rollin can manage is to occasionally evoke memories of his past works by placing various scenes in ornate cemeteries. Otherwise, the film has nothing to recommend it but the beauty of the two actresses portraying the orphans, and aside from the redundancy of the girls bearing their fangs with blood running down their chins, they are otherwise left completely at the mercy of the stupidity of the dialogue. "I adore you," one girl says to the other. "Smear me with some blood."

The film seeks to make much of the juxtaposition of the youthful, innocence of the girls' appearance and their complete amorality—in fact, it seems utterly desperate to do so. In one scene, the girls sit at a table at night cavalierly suggesting ways to kill the doctor giggling and tittering through a series of gruesome ideas. It is perhaps the nadir of the film's self-conscious twaddle.

The few moments of promise come when the orphans encounter various other netherworld entities at night. There is a madwoman in a train yard who fancies herself a werewolf, and the orphans also come across a winged vampire woman who aids them in escaping some men in a cemetery (where else?), and a ghoul (also a woman), who chases the girls away after protesting that she prefers not to be observed while feasting on the dead. Apparently Rollin had reached a point in his weird artistic odyssey where only women figured to be bizarre enough to be vampires, beasts, and ghouls. Perhaps, despite his age, women were a bigger mystery to him than ever.

Curiously, the film's most Rollinesque moment is one that he was not even present to participate in. Inexplicably, a brief passage of the film was shot in New York City, an expense that could hardly be justified given the fleeting nature of the scenes, and Rollin was unable to make the trip owing to health issues (he was by then on a rigorous dialysis schedule). It was an assistant that shot the New York footage, including what would turn out to be the film's most noteworthy moment. After finding a victim on the Brooklyn Bridge, the girls then joyously make their way to a cemetery and wash the blood from each other with some water from an arrangement of flowers left at a graveside. It is a cemetery in the middle of New York City, yet looking like any other from a Rollin film, its headstones old and weathered, and a small iron fence surrounding it. The camera then pans up to show the adjacent church, magnificent, aged, and completely dwarfed by skyscrapers on all sides (one of the twin towers is even glimpsed in the upper corner of the frame). It was the perfect embodiment of Rollin's vampire films: there was this wonderful, archaic structure, encroached upon from every direction and swallowed up by the modern world. One could almost still hear the last vampire from *Requiem* intoning, "Soon, all of this will be gone."

By the time he made *Orphans*, Rollin had a devoted cult following, and he seems to have become a victim of his own legend. The pressure to deliver, the urge to retake his place atop the heap of the most shocking—it all had to come into play. Just like the vampire from *Requiem*, indulging his followers in order that he might still feel alive, Rollin seemed to now take his relevance from playing to a desensitized contemporary audience for whom the highest virtue was the ability to shock. With his final vampire film, 2002's *The Fiancé of Dracula*, Rollin's artistic collapse would be complete.

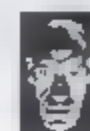
*Fiancé* begins on familiar ground, opening in a cemetery as two vampire hunters—one old, the other not—hide behind some headstones. They are stalking no less than Dracula himself, and through their nocturnal graveyard stakeout are able to discover that Dracula's betrothed, a woman named Isabelle, is in a mansion in Paris, where she is guarded by a group of nuns who have fallen under the Count's spell. Through another stakeout, the vampire hunters are able to follow Isabelle to a beach where the marriage ceremony is to take place, and as a confrontation ensues, the insane nuns go on a murderous rampage, attacking everyone in sight. Amid the chaos, the Count and his intended manage to make their escape.

Nearing the end of his career, Rollin had finally gotten around to the most notorious of all vampires. It is both curious and disappointing that his depiction of Dracula would then turn out to be the worst in film history, a thoroughly placid being devoid of even a hint of menace. Coming across as a sedated version of Frank Langella's portrayal, there is nothing remotely sinister or at all intimidating about Rollin's Dracula, which seems to have been the intention. Put a sweater on him and he would be the epitome of the 1960s TV sitcom *Dad*, he is so affable. The film even ends with Dracula walking hand-in-hand with his wife along a bright, sunny beach; they are both dressed casually, and give the impression of being nothing other than a couple of happy tourists. The scene could easily be a vacation ad for the Bahamas—and *this is the Lord of the undead*? It's almost as though Rollin were looking to drive a stake through the heart of his own reputation, but more likely he was attempting to reclaim his interpretive individuality.

In *The Fiancé of Dracula*, Rollin tries hard to create a weird twilight world of bizarre beings—a frequently-nude vampire woman and her dwarf lover, an attractive ogress who eats babies, a so-called she-wolf (though she never changes from being the lovely Brigitte Lahaie)—but the film's principal preoccupation—the insane nuns—is what is most revealing of the filmmaker's desperation. Nuns are a hot-button issue, always guaranteed to produce controversy when portrayed without regard for cultural sensitivities, and the decision to show them chomping on cigars, smoking pipes, hiking their habits to show their panties and shake their asses, kissing each other sensually, behaving like general lunatics, and committing wanton acts of cruelty and murder comes across as a childish form of attention seeking. Quite simply, it is a cheap shot that one would expect of lesser talents, but which ought to be well beneath the dignity of a serious artist. Any legitimate artist can generate controversy through the natural process of thoughtful and inquisitive seeking: only a hack insults his audience with infantile and belligerent parading. The once-fascinating filmmaker, who had created such haunting visual poetry, had degraded himself, becoming the equivalent of a barker at a carnival freak show.

From the late-sixties through the mid-seventies, Rollin created some of the most thoughtful, haunting, and visually stirring vampire films ever made. He should always be remembered at his best; the beautiful girls in see-through gowns carrying candelabras through castle corridors and misty cemeteries, those wan-like, joyless eyes of the living dead—they are all lasting images, and Rollin conveyed them as well as anyone ever did. Perhaps if he had stopped in the mid-seventies, and had simply continued to make weird porn as Michel Gentil, then Jean Rollin would be remembered as the one who got it right, not the one who lost his touch.

## JEAN ROLLIN (1938-2010)



*The Fiancé of Dracula* (2002).





# No Fangs, But a Lot of Bite: John Landis Looks Back on *Innocent Blood*

BY AARON GRAHAM

In 1981, John Landis finally brought to the screen a script that originated roughly ten years prior. Its inspiration came from a random roadside sighting of some superstitious Yugoslavians, their burial rituals, and Landis' Universal Monsters-derived speculations of what a full moon can bring. At the time, Landis was just a 19-year-old schlepping around the set of *Kelly's Heroes* as a production assistant. But ten years later—after mammoth-sized successes like *Animal House* and *The Blues Brothers*—he finally had enough clout to make his *An American Werewolf in London* a reality.

As everyone who's laid down coin for this magazine knows, the picture changed the game of cinematic werewolves with its gleeful blend of outré comedy and blood-curdling horror. And that's to say nothing of Rick Baker's bone-crunching transformation sequence—so ingenious that an Academy Award was created just to reward the monster-maker, a close collaborator of Landis' since the salad days of *Schlock* (1973).

Today, *Werewolf's* influence may be most notable via the UK. Its pulse can be felt in the work of Edgar Wright (*Shaun of the Dead*) and in television series like *Psychoville*. In 2007 Brit super-fan Paul Davis even took his obsession to the source, producing an independent documentary—*Beware the Moon*—with the participation of key cast and crew. (Eventually, this fan-initiated labor-of-love attracted the attention of Universal, where it was thankfully included as a DVD/Blu-ray supplement.) It seems only fitting, then, that Landis' most recent project is a UK production: *Burke and Hare*.

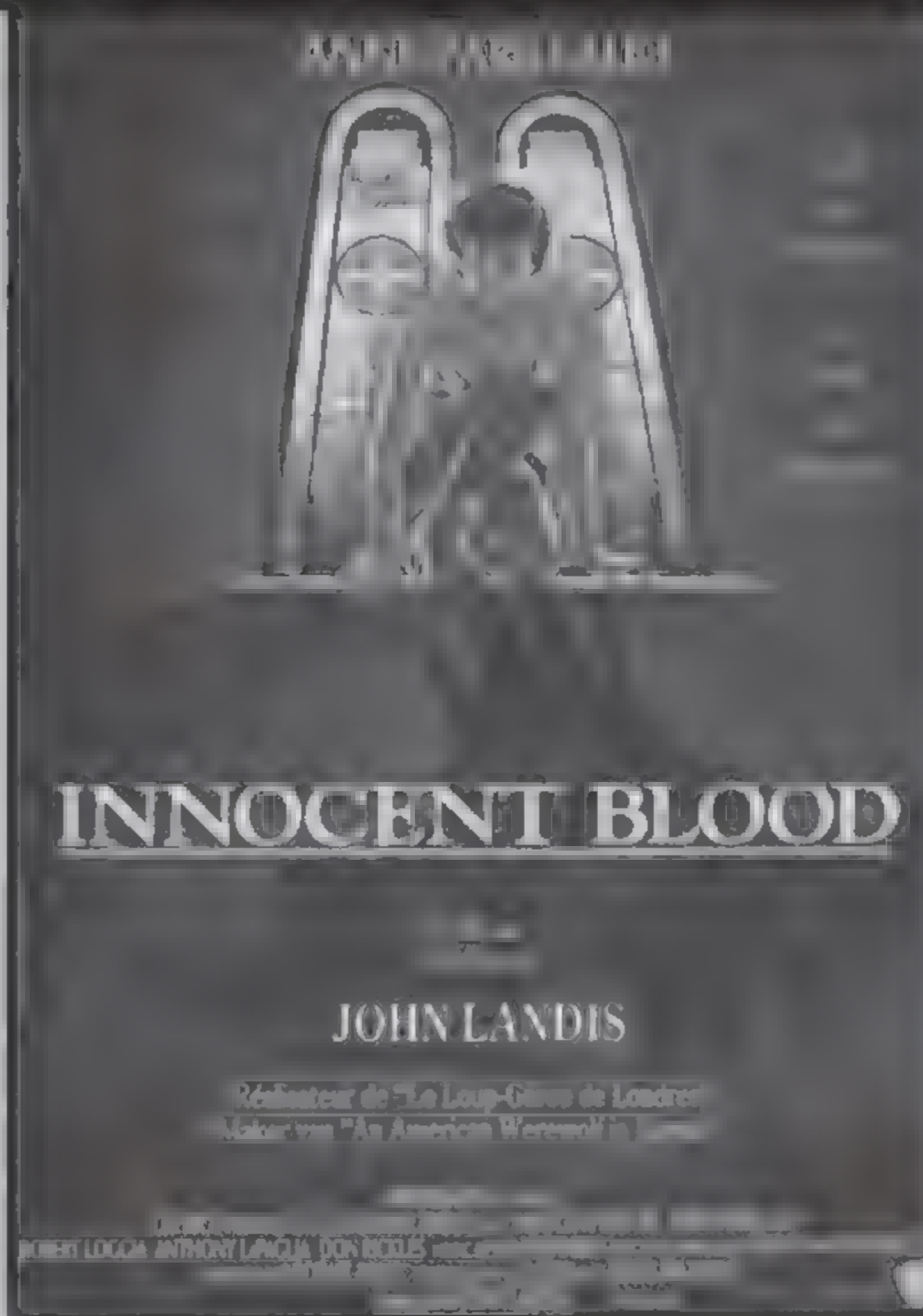
Michael Jackson's *Thriller* and its gyrating living undead notwithstanding, it would be 11 years after *Werewolf* before Landis would get the chance to put his stamp on another monster movie staple. The theme of this issue should tip you off: bloodsucking creatures of the night. The film: 1992's *Innocent Blood*.

*Innocent Blood* focuses on greedy, merciless Pittsburgh-based mafiosi who unwittingly serve as a food source for a petite, moralistic vampire named Marie (Anne Parillaud, fresh off of Luc Besson's action trendsetter *Nikita*). Marie maintains a strict code of honor—she refuses to feast on civilians who are good at heart. In the process of mistakenly turning crime boss Salvatore 'The Shark' Macelli (Robert Loggia) into a bloodsucker Marie falls for undercover cop Joe Gennaro (Anthony LaPaglia). Marie and Joe team up to sever the infection and keep the Shark's capos from further spreading their now-supernaturalized brand of evil, stopping only for an erotic *rendezvous*. Co-starring legendary Vegas comedian Don Rickles in a terrific role that prefigures a similar turn in Martin Scorsese's *Casino*, the film also boasts most of the entire cast of *The Sopranos* (David Proval, Tony Sirico) way before *The Sopranos*.

It's hard to believe, but next year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Innocent Blood*. As a 10-year-old, I fondly recall seeing the picture in a seemingly endless hazy HBO loop the summer after it was released—the sort where you would start viewing a film during a middle sequence, and would wait to watch the beginning the next time it aired. And then, only if you felt some sort of strange fascination, view it in its entirety the next time, plus several times after that for good measure if it further struck a chord. I probably shouldn't have been watching the film in the first place considering its copious amount of nudity, but even at a young age, the sly wit and gruesome shocks were hard to pass up. You see, Landis' films are like catnip for male youngsters, prone to extravagant car crashes, an irreverently blissful sense of humor, and the occasional pair of bare breasts.

Affable, witty and as movie-mad as they come, conversing with the energetic Landis is an adrenaline rush for the cult cinema enthusiast. The references are fast and furious, befitting a film culture consciousness equally in debt to *Famous Monsters of Filmland* as it is to *Sight & Sound*. There's no end to his knowledge of—and palpable enthusiasm for—filmdom's past depictions of vampiric lore. In short, he's exactly the warm, gregarious presence you've no doubt witnessed in countless on-camera interviews these past few decades or, more recently, in his mini-commentaries for pal Joe Dante's *Trailers from Hell* website.

In my research (mainly back issues of *Fangoria*, in which Bill Warren handled the on-set stories), I discovered *Innocent Blood* wasn't the first project with vampires that Landis planned to make. This discussion—held in February 2011—picks up with the earlier proposed picture, to be titled *Red Sleep*.



**SCREAM:** *Red Sleep*. This would have been in the late 1980s?

Landis: Yeah. They [Warner Bros.] kind of gave me *Innocent Blood* to shut me up. (laughs) Mick Garris and Richard Christian Matheson wrote a vampire script called *Red Sleep*. The premise was that Las Vegas has always had a king. In the 50s and 60s, you'd say it was Sinatra, and in the 70s, it would be Elvis. And then for a bit, it was Wayne Newton, Siegfried and Roy—there are always the top acts in Vegas.

In the screenplay, there was this extraordinary hotel casino in Vegas, like Caesar's Palace, where there was this figure called the Duke of the Dark. He was like the greatest entertainer of all time. He was a cross between Sinatra and Elvis and David Bowie and everybody. It was all very Rat Pack. He was kind of crossed with Howard Hughes, too, because he lived in the penthouse of this fabulous resort. [The Duke] would perform six nights a week. The premise that I liked—and you have to understand that Vegas really was booming at the time—was that not only was he really a vampire, but the *King of the Vampires*! And because Vegas is a night town, it was actually founded and run by vampires because it was a way of creating a transient population to feed on. All the people who ran it worked from

dusk till dawn and then everybody else during the day didn't realize they were working for vampires.

It was a very clever script. It *really* was about show business. So, I took it to Warner Bros. I had it rewritten by Harry Shearer who did a brilliant revision of it with my input. He [Shearer] made it the real Vegas. It was quite outrageous, and it was nuts because it had big musical numbers and lots of violence—and this was before all of the vampire movies! Vampires eventually came back—just like zombies are back all of a sudden. Everything goes in cycles. There was *Interview with the Vampire*, and Francis Coppola's *Dracula*, and all these big vampire movies. But this would have come before them.

**Do you recall any specifics? Any individual scenes that you regret not being able to film?**

The protagonists were four boys. There was this wonderful scene where one of them is invited to a party at the Duke of the Dark's penthouse. And he goes up to the party and it's beyond your wildest Hugh Hefner imagination kind of thing. But what was great was *who* I got to agree to be attending the party in the movie. This is where it's discovered that, in fact, all these people are vampires—a woman is brought out and devoured. I had people like Siegfried and Roy, Don Rickles, Steve Lawrence, Sammy Davis Jr., Wayne Newton—it was amazing that all of these people agreed to do it on this outrageous premise! At Warners, they just looked at us, and said, "Are you crazy?!"

**So that was the end of that?**

So it [*Red Sleep*] didn't happen, but they said, you know, we have *another* vampire movie. It was with (producer) Lee Rich, and it was written by a guy name Mike (Michael) Wolk. I have no idea what happened to him. I thought he came up with a very funny idea. What intrigued me was this guy Macelli—he's a monster, he's the real deal! To me, the most frightening and brutal scene in the movie is when we're introduced to him and he murders that guy with the toaster oven. I mean, that's really horrific stuff.

So, you take this monster and then give him super powers. He's just a murderer and a thug, and she [Marie] accidentally makes him supernatural. It's basically about the mafia, but I like mixing genres, so it was my idea that it would be Marty Scorsese making a Hammer film.

**What do you recall about the shooting?**

We went off to Pittsburgh. And it was freezing! When you see that picture, all that snow was real. It was supposed to be eight or nine weeks of night shooting, but because the weather was so bad, there were so many [nights] where we couldn't shoot. We lost a lot of time. I think we ended up being closer to 11 and a half weeks.



What really strikes me about the film is the detailed production design. All of those neon signs.

We put up a lot of neon just to dress it up and make it look better. Pittsburgh's actually been cleaned up quite a bit since then. It's a beautiful location—on three rivers; it's quite remarkable. And downtown Pittsburgh—with all of those big buildings, at least at *that* time—was very busy during the day, and completely deserted at night. There was nobody there at night! [It was] great for filming.

**And originally it was set in New York?**

The original script was set in Manhattan, but at that time there were a lot of pictures that shot Pittsburgh for New York. They had some kind of tax deal, so there was some reason to go to Pittsburgh. So I went there thinking we could use it for Manhattan, and then maybe shoot in Little Italy for a week. But then, when I was in Pittsburgh, I said, "Why can't we set this here?" We just changed some things around and made everything fit Pittsburgh.

**Another interesting aspect about your take on the vampire is that they don't have fangs.**

Well, if you look at *Dracula* with Bela Lugosi, he has no fangs. And, truthfully, vampires didn't really always have fangs. I think the first movie where you really saw fangs was *Horror of Dracula* with Chris Lee.

**which can be glimpsed on a television screen [in *Innocent Blood*].**

Right. The reality is that any fantasy, or any movie regardless if it's fantasy or not—every movie, every book, every play—creates its own rules for what happens. There are things in some movies that you'll accept, but in other movies you won't. For instance, in *The Blues Brothers*, we watch and do not question that this car can leap over things—you just accept it because those are the rules of *that* movie. When you deal with a fantasy figure, especially a figure of folklore like the vampire, it's amazing how the rules change from movie to movie.

I remember when I made *An American Werewolf in London*, I was criticized because he [David, portrayed by David Naughton] wasn't killed by a silver bullet. Do you know where that whole silver bullet thing comes from? Curt Siodmak! He wrote *The Wolf Man*. He was listening to *The Lone Ranger* on the radio and he thought, "Hey! That's pretty good—silver bullets like the Lone Ranger uses!" So that's where it comes from, and it was used in one of the [Universal] sequels. In fact, before that, there's some tradition to the idea that silver has supernatural qualities. But the whole silver bullet thing is a Hollywood invention. Like a lot of what we accept as traditional legend or mythologies, screenwriters actually made it up.

It's interesting, because, really, what rules do you follow? In my particular movie, she [Marie] can't deal with garlic, but she *does* have a reflection. And the crucifix has no power over her at all. In some movies, the crucifix will burn the vampire, and in other movies, it's all stakes through the heart.

**What other rules did you want *Innocent Blood* to live by?**

In this case, we followed most of the traditional vampire rules, like they can't be in sunlight. For instance, in some vampire movies, you *have* to invite a vampire into the room—a vampire cannot enter unless you invite it in. But in most movies, that's not true. It just depends on who's making the movie and what the rules are for *that* picture. There are all different rules for lycanthropy, and for witchcraft, but basically you can make up anything you want for anything that's untrue.



Marie (Anne Parillaud) is about to feast on a victim in *Innocent Blood*.

actually keep up four walls and a roof so it doesn't fall down, then you—no pun intended—build on that.

When people don't know rules, often it's just anarchy. And in order to break rules, you really should know what the rule is in the first place. For instance, the classic case of this is when Hitchcock made *Psycho*. He did something that was so shocking at the time—and the power of it is hard for contemporary audiences to understand today—but when *Psycho* came out Janet Leigh was a major movie star. And you didn't kill your major movie star thirty minutes into the movie.

That was so brutal, and it caught people off balance, and we can't recapture that kind of impact. Very much like *Night of the Living Dead*, or *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*—brilliant films that really screwed with the rules. And all three are still brilliant films, but for an audience now who have seen copies and imitations of things influenced by those films, they're just not as shocking.

**What are your thoughts on the casting of Anne Parillaud today?**

One of the things I thought Anne did wonderfully was this idea that she had super strength. Anne was a ballerina as a kid, and she's really light and had a very muscular body. She really gave a physical performance that she could really sell. I mean, you saw this little waif of a girl, and suddenly you could buy that she could do these amazing feats.

**One of the performances that seems to always get singled out is Don Rickles. Everybody enjoys him in the movie.**

Everybody loves Don Rickles. I'm also so grateful to Bob Loggia. I was thrilled to have him, and he was just so committed. I told him for this movie, "There's no such thing as over the top," and he just totally committed himself a million percent. I think he's wonderful in the movie, because I think he's genuinely horrifying and frightening and, also, really funny.

**Had you stayed in touch with Don Rickles between *Kelly's Heroes* and *Innocent Blood*?**

I knew Don. And I worked with him once before on this television thing with George Burns [1985's *George Burns Comedy Week: Disaster at Buzz Creek*]. But I've known him for years and years. I didn't know Bob Loggia. I saw him recently. He's still out there, still acting. I saw him at Kevin McCarthy's memorial service.

**How would you sum up your feelings of the film today?**

I like *Innocent Blood*. I think it's very funny. I think she's [Parillaud's] great. And it was one of Anthony LaPaglia's first big deals. I remember being so surprised that he was Australian.

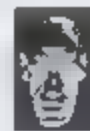
But I'm quite fond of it [*Innocent Blood*]. It actually did okay—it did better foreign than domestic. It wasn't a giant hit, but it made money. I think it was just too wacky. A lot of the movies I make—regardless of the critical response at the time—later become respected. It's weird.

John Huston very famously said that "Motion picture directors, buildings, and prostitutes grow respectable with age," and now that I'm sixty, I find that all these movies that were critically kind of shit on are now referred to as "classic films." It's amusing. Because, you know, they're the *same* movie!

*Aaron Graham wishes to thank Bill Krohn for his assistance with this article. John Landis' new book Monsters in the Movies will debut in September from DK Publishing.*



Don (of the dead) Rickles.



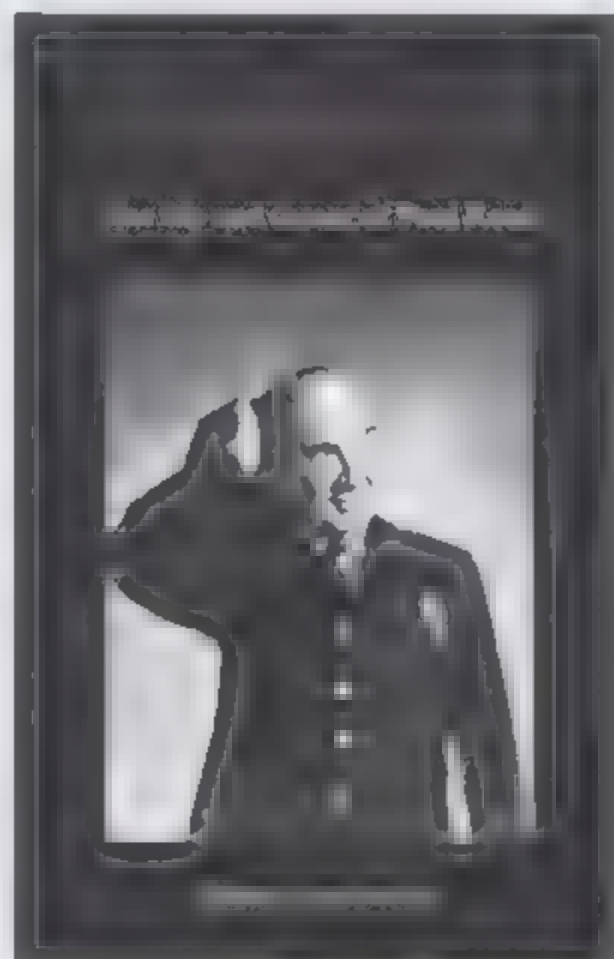


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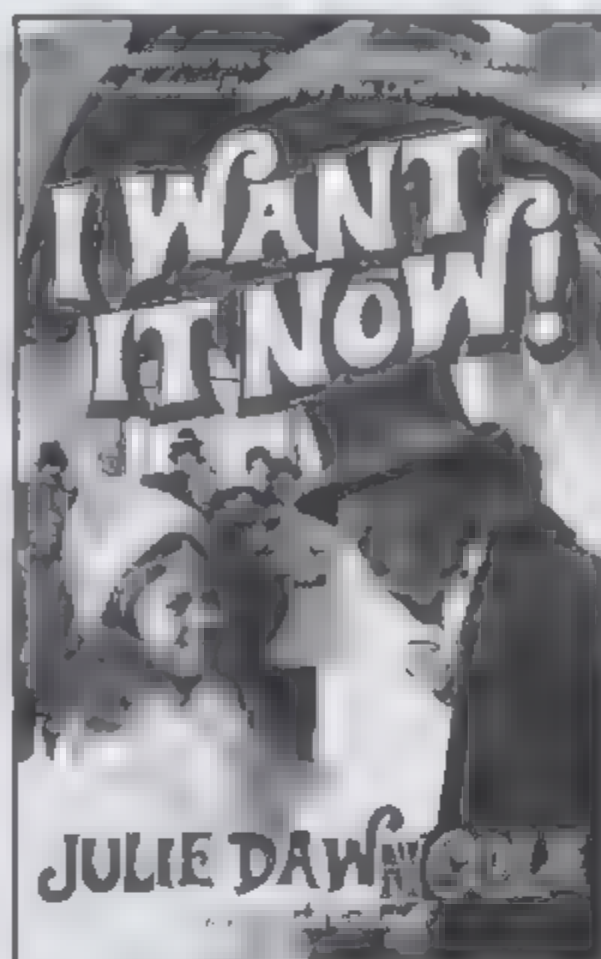


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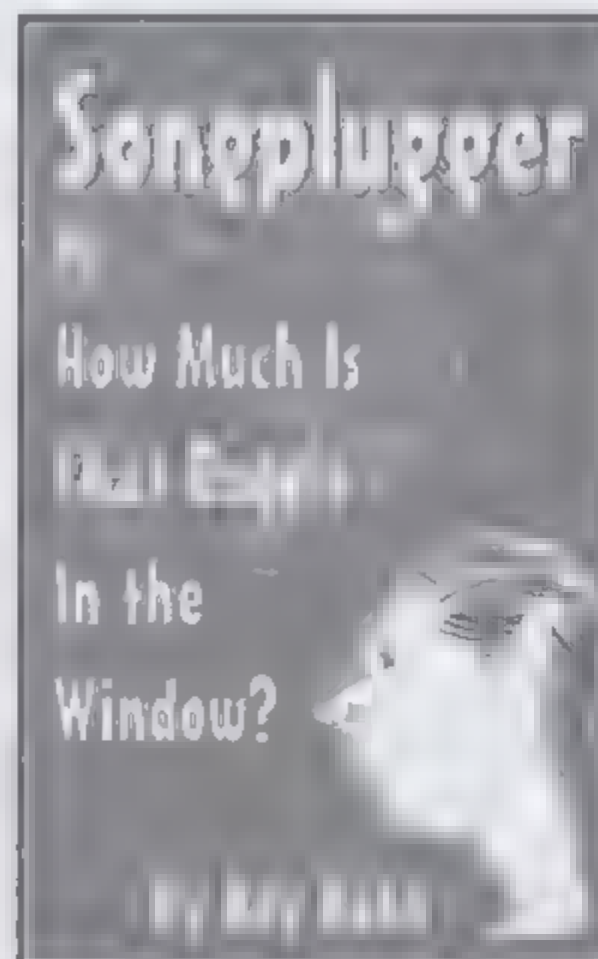
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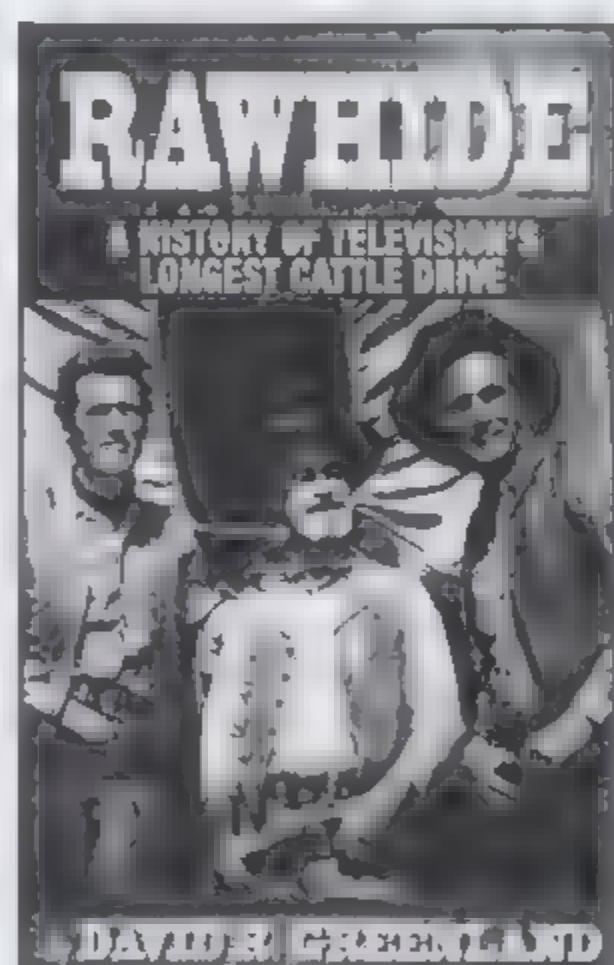
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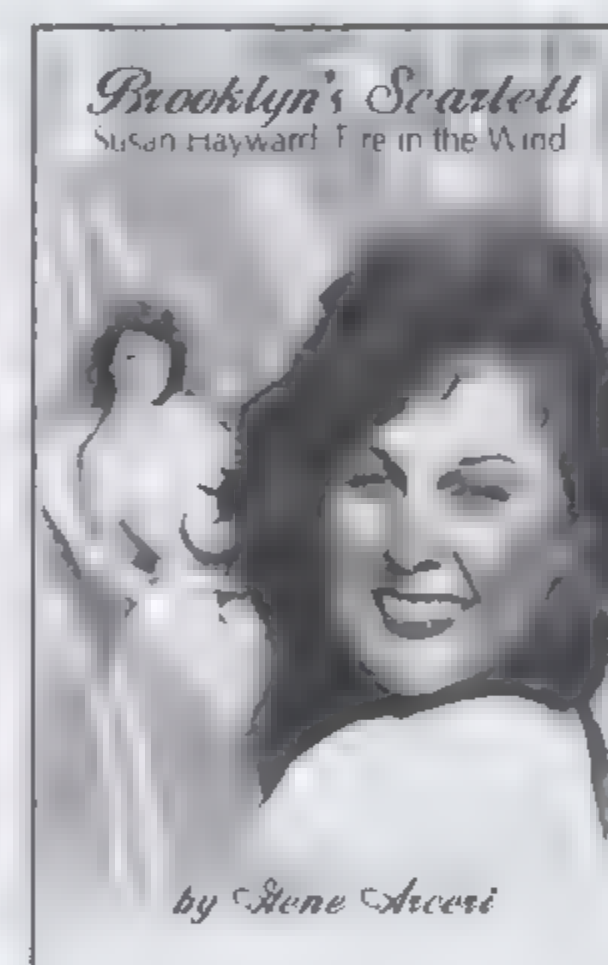
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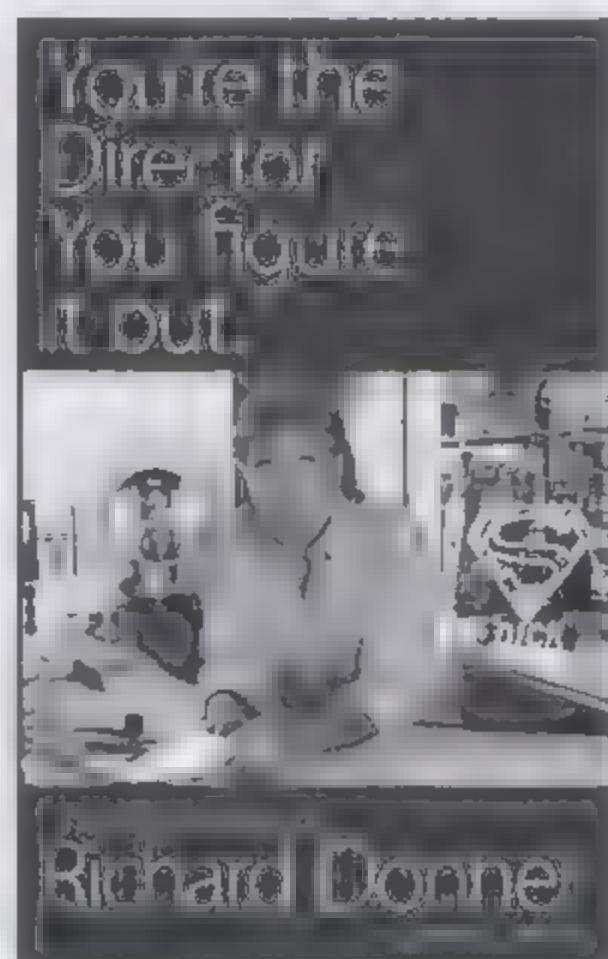
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# VAMPIRE FILMS THAT HAMMERED ME

ARTICLE BY SHANE M. DALLMANN

A great many of my film discoveries during my grade school years were made via the local weekday "3:30 Movie." Films of every stripe regularly made the rounds, but the special "theme" weeks were always the most fun to anticipate—particularly as the special theme involved monster/horror movies more often than not. What could be better? I'd always have my weekend "creature feature" fix—but an entire week's worth of genre entertainment? Bring it on! The catch, of course, was that the "3:30 Movie" shoehorned whatever it happened to be showing into a 90-minute time slot (imagine the havoc wreaked when it was *Planet of the Apes* week, for instance). Nevertheless, it was in that format that I saw many of the Hammer classics for the first time. And my curiosity over one particular title was aggravated not once but twice when promised screenings of the tantalizingly titled Hammer thriller *Vampire Circus* (filmed 1971, released 1972) were abruptly replaced with airings of the Herbert Lom *Phantom of the Opera* (nothing against that film, but *seen it, seen it!*). Nevertheless, I finally caught up with *Vampire Circus* just before that film's silent strongman (David Prowse) became internationally famous as the body of Darth Vader (though I'd seen him as the Monster in *Horror of Frankenstein*—he'd soon encore in *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* as well).

The "3:30 Movie" version started abruptly with the opening credits. Someone had obviously just set fire to a palatial dwelling, most likely belonging to the subject of an oil painting that kept popping up to glare at the viewer—beyond that, I knew nothing about the setup. The main story commenced in the village of Schtettel, now quarantined and besieged by a Black Death-like plague. But despite the barricades, a gypsy carnival managed to enter the village, promising wonderful, escapist entertainment for the miserable villagers. Naturally, ulterior motives were involved—the caravan has actually come to exact vengeance in the name of Count Mitterhaus (Robert Tayman of *House of Whipcord*), revealed to be the vampire apparently slain in the opening sequence. "And your children shall die to give me back my life!" was the rallying cry echoed in flashback.

What a collection of creepy characters—the likes of which I'd never seen on film (Hammer or otherwise). Some were vampires, some were mortals loyal to their cause. In addition to the aforementioned strongman, the crew included the mistress of ceremonies (Adrienne Corri of *A Clockwork Orange*)—revealed to be the (still human) mother of one of the village maidens (Lynne Frederick of *Schizo* in her screen debut). Robin Sachs and Lalla Ward (*Doctor Who*) were the acrobatic vampire twins Henrich and Helga, who shared a weird "Corsican Brothers" connection (leading to a beautiful and original payoff near the end of the film). And while the twins could transform themselves into the traditional bats, there was also Emil (Anthony Higgins, credited as Anthony Corlan—look for him in *Taste the Blood of Dracula* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*), who instead took on the form of a beautiful black panther when the situation called for it. And then there was Skip Martin (*Horror Hospital*) as the cheerfully malevolent dwarf clown. The forces of good included young hero John Moulder-Brown (I had yet to see him in *The House That Screamed*) and one more link to more traditional Hammer Horror Thorley Walters (*Frankenstein Created Woman*, *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed*) as the town Burgermeister.

Though significant parts of the story were obviously missing, owing to the afternoon time slot, *Vampire Circus* held my attention from beginning to end by virtue of its novelty value and its uncompromising intensity. Particularly riveting was a sequence in which two young brothers are lured into the "Mirror of Life" tent, only to be confronted by Heinrich and Helga, who gaze lovingly and leisurely into their eyes (to the apparent hypnotic pleasure of the boys) before unleashing their fatal bites (the concept of undead afterlife for vampire victims is completely abandoned in this film—they *kill* you and that's that). As the story raced towards its multi-fatal climax, blatant cuts forced me to imagine exactly what befell many a perpetrator, but even so, as the closing credits rolled, I was convinced that the curse had been fulfilled no matter *who* was left standing.

Cut to 1978. *Vampire Circus* showed up on the same station at 12:30a.m. For the first time, I saw the lengthy prologue sequence in which a possessed village woman sacrificed a young girl to the eager attentions of Count Mitterhaus before her devastated husband (Laurence Payne of *The Crawling Eye*) and his fellow townspeople crashed the estate of the vampiric aristocrat. For the first time, I saw the erotic "tiger dance" performed by Milovan and Serena (the latter appearing nude under striped body paint—interestingly, she would go on to dominate the cover art of the Spanish DVD). And for the first time, I saw the sequence in which the diminutive clown pretended to lead a group of fleeing villagers to safety, only to set them up for flesh-rending death at the claws of Emil. And I still wasn't seeing the entire package. What I took for granted as a television edit was actually the complete American theatrical version of *Vampire Circus*—one of Hammer's

more frankly adult features had been bowdlerized for the sake of a PG rating on these shores. And yet the cuts were obvious. One could easily tell where nudity had been excised and where bursts of gory violence were trimmed (the climactic coup de grace had been rendered particularly incoherent). But the cuts did nothing whatsoever to disguise the disturbing nature of the film *itself*. Vampires and humans alike were preying on young children and deriving obvious pleasure from the process, imbuing the film with a dark sense of perversity never approached by the established Christopher Lee/Peter Cushing formula (despite the sex and sadism added to even their latter-day entries)—but in the eyes of the American distributors, the excision of the visually explicit

material was enough to qualify it for all ages, so there you go. The film is not without its flaws: as the village gentlemen age fifteen years (after the prologue) through traditional makeup and acting, the replacement of prologue actress Domini Blythe with Adrienne Corri (presumably in the same role) in the rest of the film causes some confusion; some optical/animation effects are wanting; an attacking panther is obviously a puppet, etc. But none of this undermines the film's uniquely unsettling aura.

The fully uncut *Vampire Circus* first arrived on these shores in the early 1990s—in the form of a fuzzy bootleg cassette. It took quite a while longer for an authorized (though quite brief) American release to appear on Image laserdisc (*Vampire Circus* was never released on VHS in this country). That disc was a revelation in its day: in addition to a bounty of restored nudity, we got to see an impressive "squib" effect towards the end—and most importantly, we *finally* got to see just what transpired with the crossbow! The laserdisc was a much-sought collector's item for years—but now all that has changed. After a long



period of unavailability, *Vampire Circus* has arrived in a gorgeous Blu-ray edition courtesy of Synapse Films. The flawless, color-drenched high-definition transfer (1:66:1 widescreen) will convince you that you're seeing the film for the first time: yes, it brings some unconvincing "plague" makeup into too sharp of a focus in the early going, but wait until you see the aforementioned "tiger dance" sequence, for instance—there'll be no going back. The DTS-MA mono soundtrack is similarly pitch-perfect (an isolated music/effects track has also been provided). No running audio commentary is featured on this release, but the generous lineup of supplements should answer all of your questions and then some (said supplements are also extensively spoiler-ridden, so if you have yet to see this film, do *not* start with the extras). Daniel Griffith's half-hour documentary "The Bloodiest Show on Earth: Making *Vampire Circus*" gathers genre scholars Ted Newsom and Philip Nutman, *Video Watchdog* publisher Tim Lucas, and director Joe Dante to take us through both the film's production history and their own valuable critical observations. In a deliberate attempt to break formula while simultaneously rewarding basic expectations, Hammer allowed the film to be created by a team of newcomers to the field, including screenwriter Judson Kinberg, producer Wilbur Stark (father of Koo Stark), and director Robert Young (previously a documentarian himself, Young went on to a distinguished television career which included the *Hammer House of Horror* episode "Charlie Boy" and multiple installments of the definitive *Jeeves and Wooster* series—this remains his only theatrical feature). As an added bonus, the doc also contains interview segments with actor David Prowse (am I mistaken, or was this the first time I ever actually heard his voice?), who thinks highly of the film to this day; he also relates the story of how the imposing bodybuilder actually paid an unsolicited visit to Hammer's business office simply to announce that he'd like to play a monster in one of their films (it took a while, but of course it did eventually happen!)





The same documentary sessions yielded two additional featurettes. "Gallery of Grotesqueries: A Brief History of Circus Horrors" is self-explanatory, but it does an adequate job of covering relevant material in the years leading up to *Vampire Circus*, ranging from Lon Chaney's *The Unknown* and *The Unholy Three* through the recently departed David F. Friedman's *She Freak*. Then, Nutman takes us through his "kid in a candy store" discoveries in the mouth wateringly illustrated "Visiting the *House of Hammer*: Britain's Legendary Horror Magazine." The comic adaptation of *Vampire Circus* from that very magazine (art by Brian Bolland) is also listed as a supplement set to motion, but it's a tease consisting solely of the prologue sequence (in which the Count's name is spelled "Mitterhouse," incidentally). A brief still/poster gallery and the original theatrical trailer are also on hand; the Blu-ray is packaged with a standard DVD edition, as well.

In my eyes, *Vampire Circus* is worthy to stand with the best of Hammer's releases—and it's certainly among the very best to not feature either Christopher Lee or Peter Cushing. However, Cushing himself starred in another potent Hammer-blow from 1971. *Twins of Evil* has also been announced for the Synapse Blu-ray treatment, and this promises to be another fine package. *Twins* was the third and final entry in what was eventually known as Hammer's "Karnstein Trilogy" (though a fourth film was planned but abandoned), liberally adapted from J. Sheridan Le Fanu's vampire tale *Carmilla*. Casting and narrative continuity, however, were not a major concern of this "trilogy," which was probably just as well, as I originally saw them all cut to pieces and in the wrong order. The middle entry, *Lust for a Vampire*, had been heavily cut in the States (with even its title toned down) as *To Love a Vampire*, and this rendition appeared on television as my first Hammer/Karnstein experience (both the old Thorn-EMI VHS cassette and the Anchor Bay DVD revert to the full-strength version). And it took quite a few more years for me to finally catch up to the original entry, *The Vampire Lovers*—also in a cut TV print of the already cut U.S. release (MGM finally fixed that one up nicely for DVD). Somewhere in the middle (as well as sometime after I finally started collecting film books filled with rich and racy stills of scenes missing from the films as I had originally seen them), I stayed up (very) late and watched *Twins of Evil* for the first time. *Twins* was available fully uncut on American video since the dawn of VHS (unlike *Vampire Circus*), but as it's been out of circulation for quite some time, a brief refresher is in order. Cushing toplines as Gustav Weil, puritanical leader of a vigilante group known as The Brotherhood. They're very good at capturing and burning innocent women they deem witches, but they dare not lay a finger on the powerful, decadent young Count Karnstein (Damien Thomas). "Pray for me," he sneers. "Isn't that what you're supposed to do? PRAY for me!" Karnstein, however, is not supernaturally affected yet. But his terminal boredom and frustration are satisfied by a visit from his late ancestor Mircalla (an anagram of "Carmilla," of course), who infects him with genuine vampirism. Enter freshly orphaned twin sisters Frieda and Maria (Madeleine and Mary Collinson, famous as *Playboy's* first twin centerfolds), who have come to town to stay with their Uncle Gustav. Despite the suggestion of the poster art, only one of them actually dallies with Karnstein and becomes a vampire herself—but which one? David Warbeck (*The Beyond*) is the young hero (and choirmaster) who hopes to save the day—at least for the "good" sister. Weil would happily sacrifice both of them if necessary.

The television version of *Twins of Evil* scarcely represented the film that John Hough (*The Legend of Hell House*) actually created from a script by Tudor Gates. The absence of nudity (though not as much as you might think) was a foregone conclusion, but this rendition also toned down the viciousness of The Brotherhood (Cushing's intensity occasionally approaches that of Vincent Price in *Witchfinder General*, but Weil sincerely believes himself to be the good guy). For instance, the TV print displayed the opening credits over a sequence of Weil and his men riding their horses—the real deal shows an innocent "witch" screaming as she burns at the stake before we even get to the genuine evil of Count Karnstein. (The same people who prepared this TV version were also responsible for an unwatchable rendition of Hammer's *Hands of the Ripper*—released in tandem with *Twins*—which added a framework device in which criminal psychologist Severn Darden interminably pontificated on the onscreen action.) But from the old VidAmerica cassette through the briefly released Image laserdisc to the new Synapse Blu-ray/DVD combo, we've always been treated to the real thing. And in matters of acting, pace, and violence, *Twins* delivers quite nicely. Still, I'm forced to point out two particular "howlers" (one cut from the TV print, one not). When the spirit of Mircalla (Katya Wyeth) seduces the Count, we get nothing resembling the straight up sensuality of *Vampire Circus*; for instance, the moment in which Mircalla stretches out her arm in order to fondle a candle on the nightstand is guaranteed to bring down the house. Similarly laughable is a sequence in which the Count's mute bodybuilder servant (rather than David Prowse, we get Roy Stewart, perhaps best known as Quarrel Jr. in *Live and Let Die*) is forced to pantomime an imminent invasion of the Karnstein estate—there's no getting around the fact that his representation of "crucifix" resembles an obscene gesture in these parts. Subtlety is most definitely *not* part of the package in this case—but when *Twins of Evil* goes for the throat, it usually gets it. And if the supplements in this case measure up to those already in evidence for *Vampire Circus*, this disc will be another must-own. Consider me permanently Hammered.



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# Bloodline:

## Stoker ancestor achieves notoriety with new Dracula novel

by Bram D. Eisenthal

When you're named Bram at birth (by my mother, in memory of her late father, Abraham), especially in the latter part of the baby-booming 1950s when uncommon names weren't often heard, it kind of marks you for life. Sure, when you're a kid, you're not apt to rush off to research the roots of your moniker. But one day in my 14<sup>th</sup> year, I experienced a fateful encounter with the work of a long-dead author that marked me forevermore.

I was perusing the dog-eared paperbacks at a legendary Montreal neighborhood spot since defunct, Snowdon Pocket Novels & Comics, where they had all manner of captivating genres ("20,000 titles in stock," shouted the slogan lovingly stamped into every tome), including adult novels so sticky with lust you needed to wash your hands after handling. Adolescent-craved pornography aside, however, I was looking for a good horror read, having already fallen under the spell of Howard Philips Lovecraft. Archie, the shop's proprietor, gruffly asked, "Have you ever heard of Bram Stoker?" Quite heavysset, this wise, well-read man waddled over to a shelf and pulled out a 1965 Signet softcover that mesmerized me the moment I spied its cover. The plain white background was overlaid with a sideways-flying black bat, trailing a reddish-tinted skull in its wake. The title, of course, was *Dracula*. Looking at it today, the price wasn't marked inside, but I probably plunked down half its cover price of 60 cents. Best 30 cents I ever spent.

You read literature like this and, yeah, you tend to be a bit bored at 14. It helped, though, that Bram could conjure up lines like, "Through my lashes I saw the girl with eyes like pale sapphires bend over me. I felt a wicked, burning desire for her kiss—and a deathly fear. Lower and lower went her head. Now I felt her hot breath on my neck; the sensitive skin on my throat began to tingle. Then I could feel the soft, shivering touch of her lips and the sharpness of two teeth, pausing, just touching." What's important if you decide to try this classic, by the way, is to choose the complete, unabridged version, which usually includes the "To My Dear Friend Hommy-Beg" dedication at the start of the book.

Growing older inevitably invites enlightenment. In my case, I ultimately became a huge aficionado of Bram Stoker's work, with *Dracula* maintaining its spot on my top 10 list. I now acquire hardcover versions of *Dracula* when I locate any that are worth collecting and I even have a beat-up, far-from-mint first edition someplace. I have studied Bram's life story, and in the early 1990s, while researching a feature article for Canada's *National Post* on "The Vampires of Rhode Island," I visited the tiny town of Exeter. I learned that Bram had visited New England at least twice, as secretary to Europe's greatest thespian, Henry Irving. It was in Exeter that Bram came across the grave of young Mercy L., who died of "consumption"—a common thief of young life at the time—and Bram was lured there because it was believed Mercy had been afflicted with vampirism. Bram was so smitten with the tale that he apparently wrote the character of Lucy Westenra in honor of the girl.

You could imagine my excitement when, after I had joined the Transylvanian Society of Dracula (run by the bright and literarily-savvy Dr. Elizabeth Miller), a decade or so ago, I discovered that a descendant of Stoker's resided in Montreal. Then in his mid-seventies, accountant Patrick Stoker was the grandnephew of Bram, and I had the opportunity to meet with him and chat. Much to my shock and chagrin, he admitted that he didn't know a lot about his famous ancestor and wasn't really interested in vampires just as I was about to query him on where he stowed his coffin.

Now, regarding Patrick Stoker's nephew, Bram's great-grandnephew, I'm not so sure there isn't a smidgeon of the Count's cells rampaging through his veins. Along with Ian Holt, former teacher Dacre Stoker was a key player in the recent publication of a *Dracula* "sequel" that features the descendants of characters birthed in the original.

What was really thrilling, however, is that the novel, *Dracula The Undead*, which had its Montreal launch just prior to Halloween 2009, was penned by a 51-year-old who grew up in Montreal. And along with the publication of this book—an engaging read, by the way—came many experiences Stoker has come to cherish as well as some he'd rather forget. "I have had a few different types of encounters with fans, in person at book promotional events, on the Internet via Facebook, on the (book's) website or on various blogs.

Dacre Stoker at his "ancestral" home in the affluent Montreal suburb of Westmount.

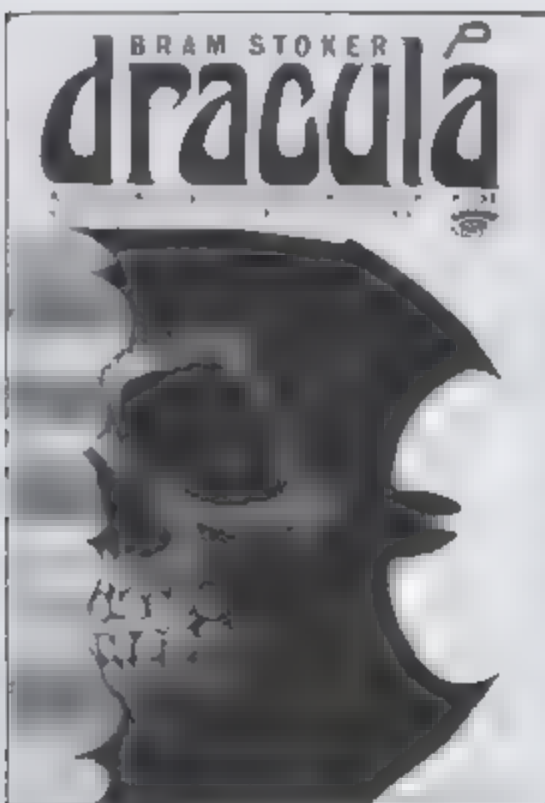


"In person, I have been surprised by how polite and interested either in me or in Bram most everyone has been. It has been surprising to me to learn how little people know about Bram and how interested they are to hear about his life. On the Internet, a less personal medium, the fan reaction has ranged from incredibly popular to 'how dare you change a classic!' I had no idea how our book would incite such a wide variety of critical review. We have received a little bit of everything and it just shows how personal a reader's relationship with a classic story can be. Most readers who have taken the time to read the book on its own merits have chosen to contact us to share their opinions and have been very thankful that we did continue the story of Bram's *Dracula*. They have been captivated by the style in which we did it."

Having been to the launch in Montreal, a humble affair that drew about 50 people the evening before a Toronto event featured hundreds of fans, as well as a theatrical performance of the novel, I was curious which city on the tour drew the best. "No doubt, Paris. The launch that our publisher, Michel Lafon, organized was in a large Virgin Megastore; the crowd was huge, the interviews were very insightful, and Ian and I felt like rock stars."

And there had to be weirdos—or at least unique personalities—coming out to play, I suspected. "The level of 'weirdness' of stories depended on the locations," Stoker stated. "I have been approached to 'donate' some Stoker blood in a very personal manner by a fan at Comic-Con in San Diego. I have been asked to sign a variety of personal body parts in L.A. at Vampire-Con. One of the most interesting experiences was meeting and understanding much more about people who practice a real form of vampirism in New Orleans at the Vampire Lestat Memnoch Resurrection Ball. I had seen sensationalized reports on TV about this practice, but as usual in real life these people are quite normal."



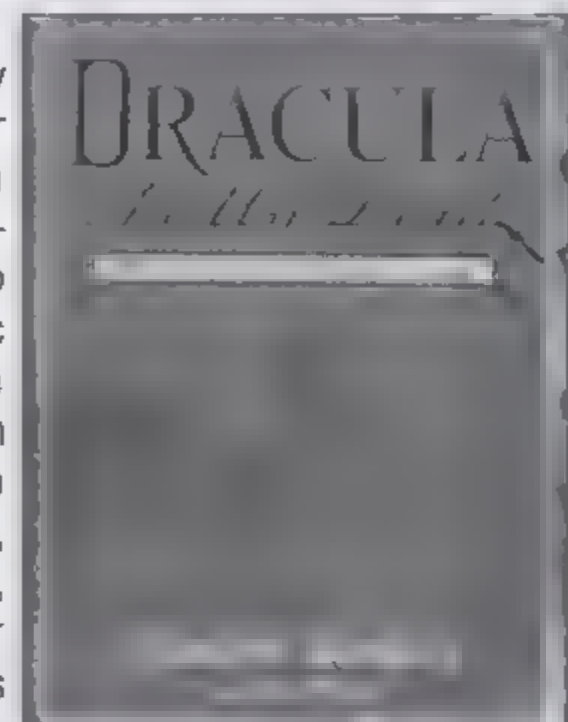


As is the case with many artistic types, it was difficult to glean very much information about the novel's marketplace fortunes from Stoker. "I have had a difficult time receiving information about sales from our agent. I suppose I could have been more proactive or aggressive, but that is not my style. Besides I am really too busy working on present projects then to look back. I do know that the hardcover rose to number 22 on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list. I guess that is pretty good, considering all the competition in the vampire genre." He adds, "I have also been very pleased with the sales in Spanish in all the Latin countries. In addition, *Dracula the Un-Dead* has sold very well in France and Italy. The trade paperback in the U.S. rose to number eight in the horror category, in November 2010."

The question of a possible sequel arose. "Ian and I are busy working on our own separate projects, so a sequel is not in the works in the foreseeable future. Ian has written a screenplay for *Dracula the Un-Dead*, but no significant interest has been generated to date." Stoker revealed that there have been some positive ramifications resulting from the literary effort, though: "One of the more interesting endeavors, which I am currently involved in, is a combined Spanish and Romanian effort to co-produce both a film documentary and a book about the mysteries surrounding Bram's writing of *Dracula*, the history of the real Vlad Dracula, and how they have become fatefully connected."

As for some additional background on this latter-day Stoker, he is actually blue-blooded, hailing from the Montreal municipality of Westmount, one of the most affluent neighborhoods, per capita, in Canada. He now resides in the U.S., but spent his Westmount childhood regularly indulging in fantasy role playing games with other local blue bloods, including children from the Bronfman, Molson (yeah, the beer company scions), and Stoker families. "The beauty of the neighborhood was that we could run through yards, hide behind hedges, and it was the type of neighborhood that was safe and had plenty of great hiding places. My house was large and it almost felt like an old castle to me. It was four stories tall, with lots of places to play hide-and-seek," recalled Stoker during an interview after he had disembarked from his train, although a Harkeresque coach ride would have been much more apropos. I figured I could even play the role of Count as Stoker tried to hide from me at his old house, which I brought him to for old time's sake and where he rang the bell and introduced himself to the son of the absent owners. The lad seemed suitably freaked out, and more than a tad impressed, when he learned who Stoker was and why he was back in town.

Regarding his connection to Bram, I truly appreciated that this Stoker was much more into the bloodsucking portion of the family history. "My two sisters and I were always aware of our connection to Bram," Stoker told me. "But it was simply not a big part of our lives. We were made more aware of our lineage around Halloween, by friends who thought it amusing to ask us what would happen at our house if they came trick or treating. Candy or blood?" Stoker said he has been in touch with two of Bram's three great-grandsons over the past six years "on a frequent basis. Prior to that we were aware of one another, but it was my Uncle Patrick who remained closest to our cousins in England." After the senior Stoker—who swam for Canada at the controversial 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin—suffered a stroke in recent years, the Stoker genealogy torch was passed to Dacre's wife, Jenne. "I have become much closer to my cousins, who reside in the U.K. They have been very helpful in assisting me in researching my next project, an illustrated tribute book in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Bram's death. They unearthed a personal notebook that Bram wrote over a 10-year period, prior to him publishing his first novel. This has helped me and my co-author Dr. Elizabeth Miller (yes, the same lady referenced earlier) to glean a very unique insight into Bram as a writer and as a young man." He continues, "Sadly, one family member had a break-in some years ago and family papers were stolen, as well as the medal Bram was awarded for bravery as he attempted to save a drowning man from the Thames River." Stoker also possesses photos of old stationery from his famous ancestor's fifth and sixth North American tours as Irving's manager. "Bram was in Montreal from September 16-21 1895 with (Irving's) Lyceum Theatre Company as they performed at the Academy of Music here, and they returned March 8, 1900 for six additional nights. He may have been here on other occasions, but I do not have more records at this point."



With *Dracula* once again resurrected, the memorabilia doesn't, however, seem all that important. The Walachian count's spirit lives on, proof that blood matters after all. In their afterworld abode, Bram Stoker and Hommy-Beg must be quite pleased.

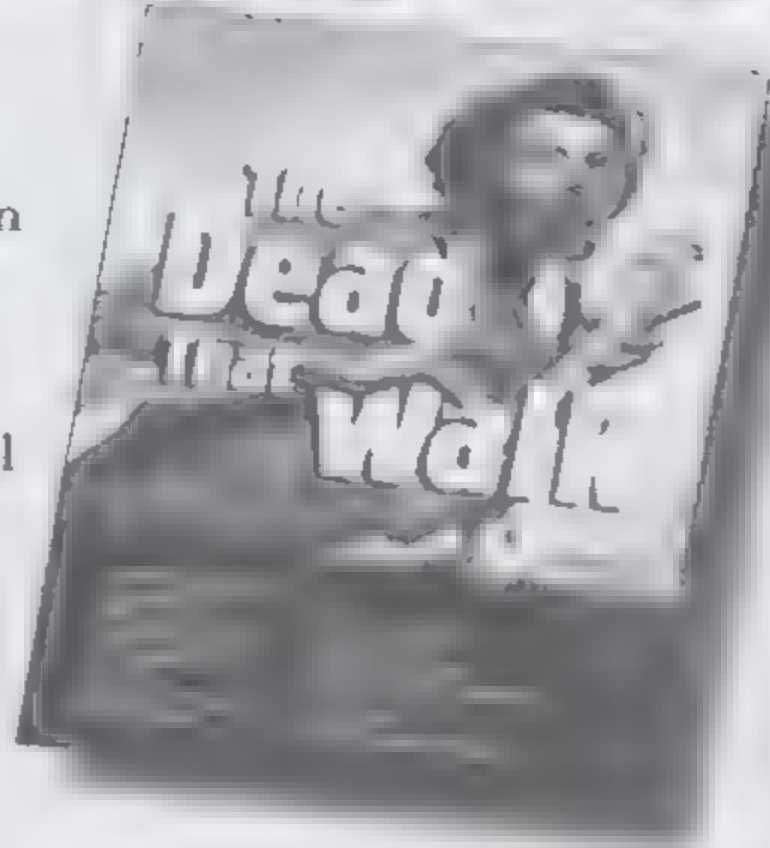
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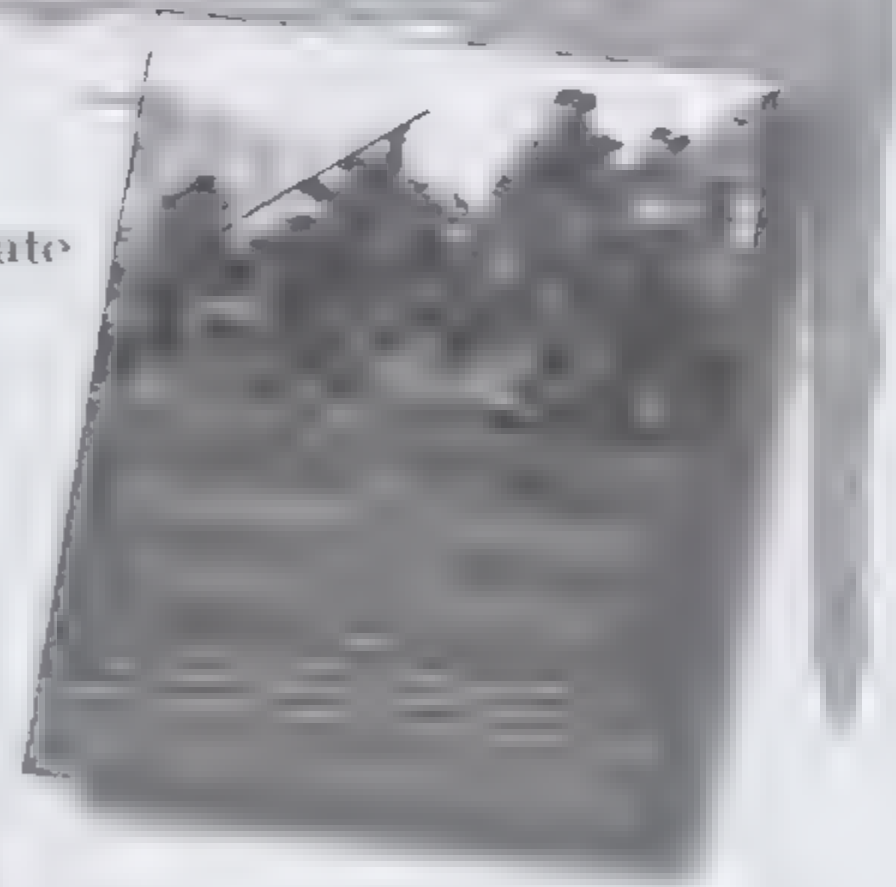
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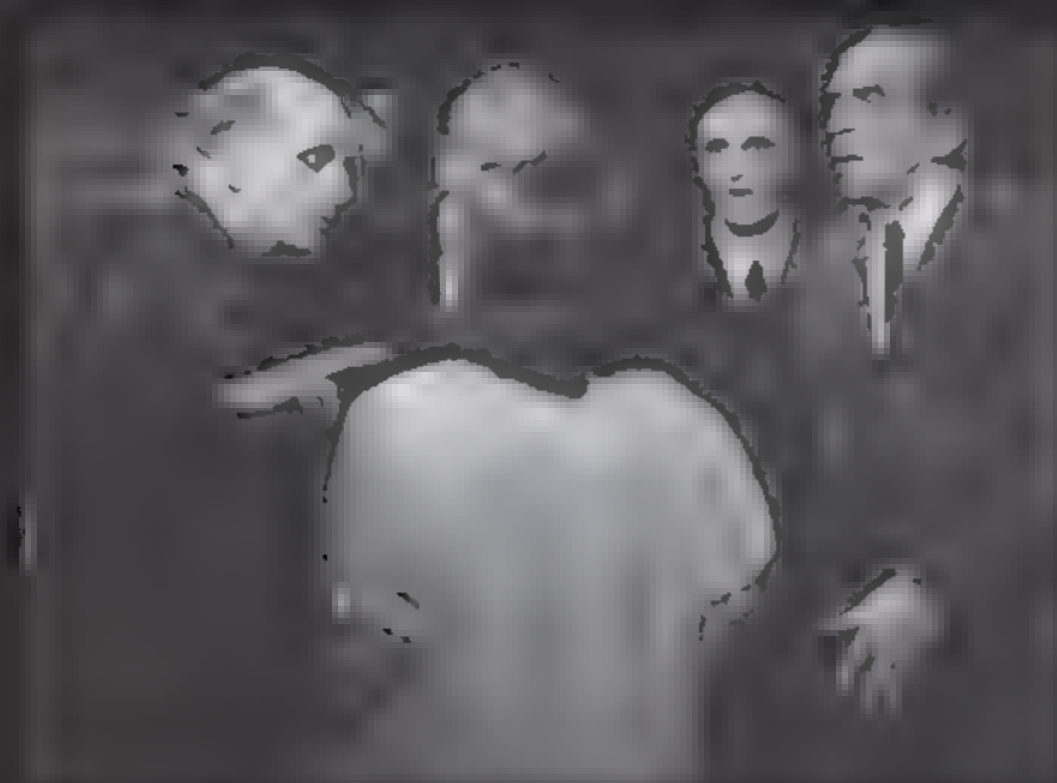


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# THE RETURN OF NORMA

## (OR HOW I MET COUNT DRACULA . . . AND SURVIVED!)

Interview by Tom Weaver

Among the movie monsters that haunted drive-ins in the 1950s were classic "European creatures" like wolf men (*The Werewolf*, *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*) and vampires (*The Vampire*) doing their dirty work in American settings. One of the best of the bunch was Levy-Gardner-Laven's 1958 *The Return of Dracula* with Francis Lederer as the thirsty count, who arrives in Small Town U.S.A. posing as the long-lost European relation of a local family, the Mayberrys. But 17-year-old Rachel begins to suspect that "Cousin Bellac" isn't what he seems—and then knows it beyond a shadow of a doubt once he begins to take a sinister interest in her.

Norma Eberhardt was no teenager when she played the role; in fact, the Oakhurst, New Jersey, native had already been for several years the wife of the elegant French actor Claude Dauphin (1903-78). Scheduled to guest at the upcoming Monster Bash convention in Butler, Pennsylvania (June 24-26), Ms. Eberhardt here recalls with wonderful candor her early acting days and her most lethal leading man.

**SCREAM:** At what point did you first become interested in becoming an actress?

**NORMA EBERHARDT:** When I was a schoolgirl, in grammar school and then in high school, I was always doing plays—writing them, putting them on, or doing OTHER people's plays. I was very much interested in it. Then when I got into junior high school, I decided to be a model, because I was always posing for a department store down in Asbury Park, in Monmouth County. I got on the train one morning, went to New York and walked into a modeling agency and said, "Here I am, I'd like to be a model"—and they said, "Fine!" and they took pictures of me. Then I had to go out on interviews and get myself hired, which I did very easily. I was featured in *17* magazine, and *Junior Bazaar*, a magazine connected to *Harper's Bazaar* that doesn't exist any more. I went from one assignment to another. When it was cold in New York, they even sent me to Florida, down to Sarasota, to the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus winter quarters; we used the circus as a background for pictures for the May-June issue. I was 17 when I started.

**Were your parents all for it?**

My parents were divorced. My father thought it was great, and my mother was very leery of it—she didn't want me to live in New York. But I did anyway. I became a very successful model. The big thing that happened to me was in 1949, when *Life* magazine did an article about me and had photographs of me, because I was known as the girl with one blue eye and one brown eye.

**When did you go to Hollywood for the first time?**

In 1950. I was signed to a contract by Universal-International, where I did a lot of bit parts. At Universal they also had me in classes, and then they decided that I didn't need to be in classes [*laughs*]. "You're funny, you do things yourself—you really don't need to be here in class." In my class was Rock Hudson, Tony Curtis, all studying very seriously with [*instructor*] Sophie Rosenstein.

**Who were some of the girls in your class?**

I don't remember.

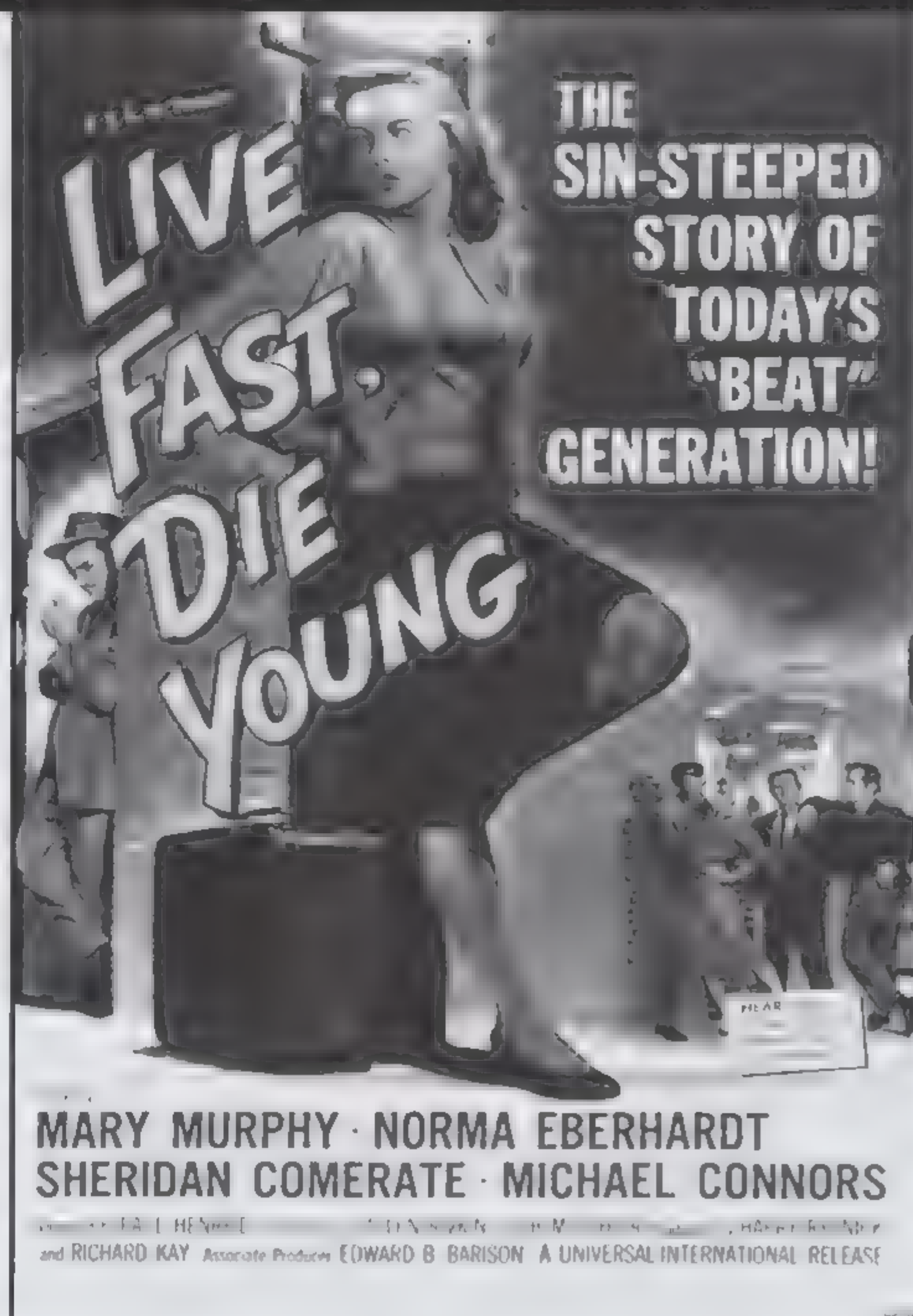
**[laughs]: You remember all the GUYS!**

Well, YEAH! But I can't remember any of the girls. Their names I've long forgotten, because I never heard of 'em again after the classes. Oh, come to think of it, one was Peggie Castle. I can't remember the titles of any of the Universal movies I did at that time, but I came back there years later for *Live Fast, Die Young* [1958]. In those early days, I also had very small parts at Paramount in *Sailor Beware* and *Jumping Jacks* [both 1952] with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

**The first semi-sizable part you had was in a cheapie called *Problem Girls***

Oh my god, that's a long time ago. I don't remember anything about it except that Helen Walker was the star of it. She was an alcoholic, but very nice. I liked her very much, and we became very friendly. She was a sweetheart. She came to the Studio Club, where I lived, for dinner with me one night. The Studio Club was a sort of Hollywood rooming house for girls, and they had to be connected in some way with the industry or they couldn't live there. They could be actresses, they could be in production, whatEVER, as long as they were connected to the arts. Barbara Rush was there; Barbara Knudson, who now lives in Las Vegas, was a friend of mine there. She had a husband named Bill Henry [*The Lady and the Monster*, *Jungle Moon Men*], who was SO jealous! In '56 or '57 when my husband Claude Dauphin and I were out in Hollywood, we had them over one day for breakfast, and Bill Henry was SO obnoxious, SO sure that Claude was flirting with Barbara! Anybody who even LOOKED at Barbara, he would get jealous. He was an alcoholic, Bill Henry. The girl who was working the MOST when I was at the Studio Club was Peggy Dow. She married an Oklahoma oil man, and her husband never wanted her to work again.

I lived at the Studio Club longer than anyone. They gave you three years there; they felt that if you didn't make it, then go home or do something else, but just get out of our club! I was having anxiety attacks, and the people at the club were very protective of me, the headmistress and the other people. And when it came time for me to move, they said I didn't have to, because they'd rather have me there. We got two meals a day there. \$19 a week we paid for a room, which had maid service, plus breakfast and dinner! My roommate Ann Stover and I lived in "The Mary Pickford Room." Ann never worked, but she was TRYING.





**Do you know how you got your part in *Return of Dracula*?**

I think they had seen me in *Live Fast, Die Young*, the movie I starred in at Universal. I forgot who else was in *Live Fast, Die Young*. Oh, one of 'em was a guy [Troy Donahue] who got to Hollywood and after a while started getting a lot of p.r., and then all of a sudden he was homeless, living in Central Park back in New York, and then he died. What a little pipsqueak he was! An obnoxious guy, VERY conceited; he thought he was the end-all. It all went to his head.

I got *Return of Dracula* because my agent submitted me for that. We made it at the studio that had belonged to Hal Roach, for Levy-Gardner-Laven. Are they still around?

**Levy and Laven, no, but Arthur Gardner, who's now 100, yes.** Isn't that wonderful? My father is now 108, and lives in New Jersey. He's retired

**[Laughs]: I should hope so!** and we talk about once a week.

**Growing up, were you a movie fan?** Yes, I used to go to the Mayfair Theater in Asbury Park. The man who owned it was Walter Reade, who owned several movie theaters in New Jersey. As a kid, I liked any movie with "pretty" things in it, like the Shirley Temples—I loved Shirley Temple.

**If you liked movies with pretty things, I bet horror movies weren't your bag.**

No! No no no no. I used to like to go to a certain theater in Asbury Park that played Westerns, and pictures with Alan Ladd—I had a crush on Alan Ladd. And also on Charles Bickford [Laughs]! My father and mother had divorced, and I guess I was looking for a daddy! But horror, no. I didn't like those kind of movies.

**How funny that the movie you're best known for is a horror movie.**

They asked me to do it, and paid me well, so of course I did it. That's why you work! Paul Landres, the director, was SO nice. But the BEST was Francis Lederer [Dracula], who was born in the 1800s.

**That's right. He died in 2000 which means he was alive in three centuries!**

He became a dear friend of mine. We had lunch an awful lot. He always had his little Minox [a subminiature spy camera] with him, and he was always taking pictures of me. We remained friends; I even remember him coming to Paris and we had dinner. At one point in the '60s, I was living with [actor] Macdonald Carey—I lived with Mac in Beverly Hills for three years, and Francis didn't approve of it. And Mac didn't like the fact that I was still friendly with Francis. (YOU know. Egos!) Anyway, Francis was SO sweet, SO nice, and we always kept in touch.

**You married Claude Dauphin, you had a thing for Francis Lederer—you must like the Continental type.**

I used to, yeah. I'm too old for romance now. I don't care about things like that.

**When you talk about living with Macdonald Carey in the '60s, I assume that your marriage to Mr. Dauphin had its ups and downs.**

I left him in Paris. We never divorced. There wasn't any reason to. Also, he was afraid that this woman he was living with would want to marry him if he was divorced. So we never divorced. He died in 1978 in France.

**What year did you stop living with him?**

I married him in '55, I left him in '65. Then when I met Mac, I thought that he was the love of my life.



**What did you think of Lederer's performance as Dracula in the movie?**

I adored Francis, he could do no wrong as far as I was concerned. I wasn't familiar with him before *Return of Dracula* but we became bosom buddies the minute we met. He lived way out in the valley, he had a ranch out there, and he also had a house in Palm Springs. His wife was named Marion. Back in the '30s he had been married to an actress, Margo [*Lost Horizon*, *The Leopard Man*], and he was madly in love with her, and she broke his heart—he told me all about it. She was the big love of his life, Margo. I later met her when she was married to Eddie Albert, and socialized with her a couple of times.

**Your *Return of Dracula* boyfriend was played by Ray Stricklyn.**

Oh, I loved Ray. We were pals. When he auditioned for the part, I was there in the room, and the audition consisted of whether he could lift me up in his arms and carry me. He had to pick me up just to prove to them he could. But later when Ray went out of the room, they [the *Return of Dracula* team] talked about the fact that they were worried about his gayness. I said, "Oh, please!" [Laughs] Ray was nice. I'd go over to his place for dinner with him and his boyfriend Jim.

**In his autobiography, Stricklyn wrote about one of your visits, "One night, we'd had too much to drink, and she stayed over. We ended up in my bed, but after playing around a little, the booze took over and we both passed out."**

Oh, he's out of his mind [laughs]! I never drank. I was famous for [emphatically] nev-er drink-ing an-y al-co-hol what-so-ev-er I didn't like to see women drunk. "We ended up in bed" [Laughs]—he was NEVER in bed with a woman! He had the boyfriend named Jim

Something, who ended up in the cookie business, baking cookies. I wondered what happened to Ray because after a while I never saw him in anything any more. He passed away a few years ago. He was young to die! He was a dear, darling guy.

**You're supposed to be 17 in *Return of Dracula*.**

I was always playing younger women.

**What's even stranger is that Virginia Vincent, who plays the blind girl Jenny, is supposed to be even younger than 17—at one point, Jenny is called a little girl. And Virginia Vincent was probably in her mid-30s!**

[Laughs]: That IS funny! Virginia was nice. Jimmy Baird, who played my little brother, I hardly remember. But he wasn't any problem, wasn't any trouble. There was no [stage] mother hanging around!

**You also did a lot of episodic TV work in the '50s. Did you enjoy that?**

Oh, yeah, I loved it. *Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok* was one of the first things I did, with that good-looking guy, SO handsome, Guy Madison. I did a lot of *Matinee Theatres*; I did a *Whirlybirds*, which was produced by Lucille Ball, a friend of mine; I did *Captain Gallant of the Foreign Legion* in France with Buster Crabbe. Oh, and *State Trooper* with Rod Cameron—he was very nasty. What a nasty man! Very mean.

**Your last role may have been in a *Hogan's Heroes* in 1969. Why did you get away from acting?**

I met Mac [Macdonald Carey], he'd just left his wife, and we fell in love. He found us a nice little house on Benedict Canyon, and I moved in with him. After that, I didn't want to [pursue further acting roles]; I was very busy taking care of him. I was like a housewife—and a maid [laughs]! I was always taking care of the house, shopping, cooking, taking care of HIM—he was an alcoholic. Now I live in a New York apartment I've had since 1965. It's in a lovely townhouse, and I have the first floor with a garden.

**What are your hobbies today?**

Reading. You name it, I read it! Right now I just finished a book called *Cleopatra: A Life*, which is on the bestseller list. Before that I was reading *Life with My Sister Madonna*, written by her brother. Oh! She was a mean bitch—I mean, REALLY a mean bitch to him! I read several books at the same time. I also paint pictures, mostly of children, flowers, things like that. I've had shows, and I've sold.

**Do you ever watch any of this stuff? Do you have a DVD player?**

No. I have DVDs that people have given me, but I don't have a player.

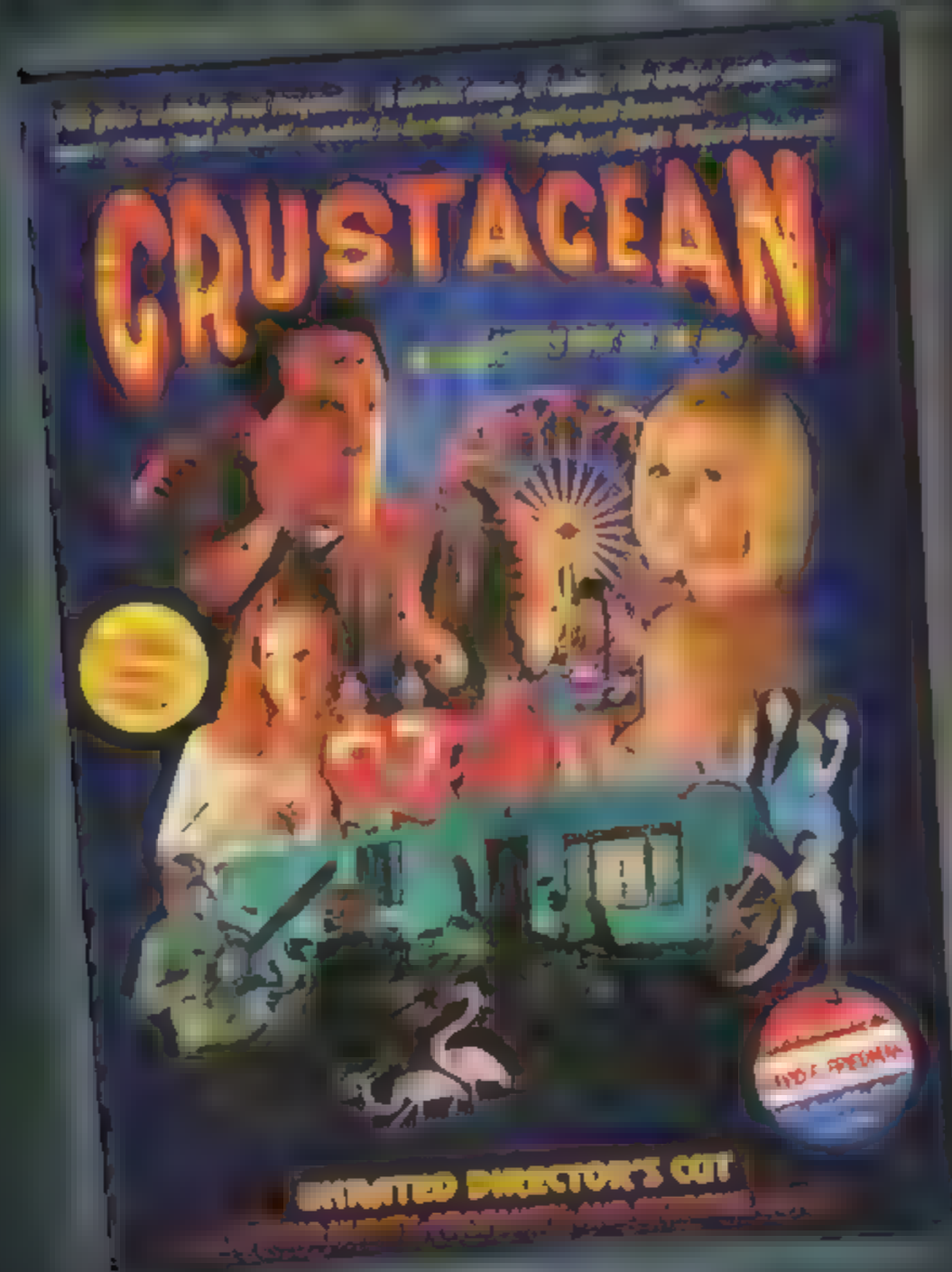
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Nope! I don't have a cell phone, I don't have ANYthing. I don't like complicated mechanics!





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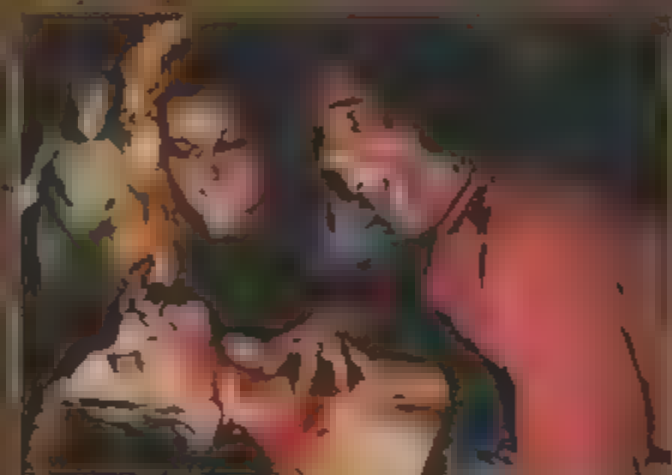
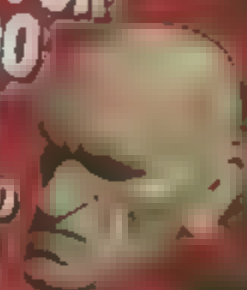
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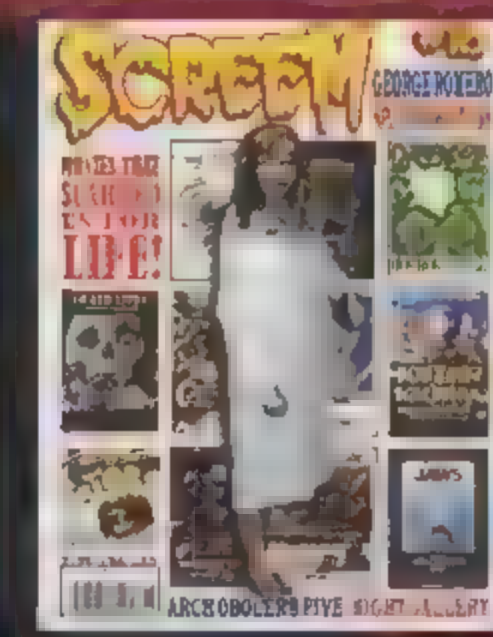
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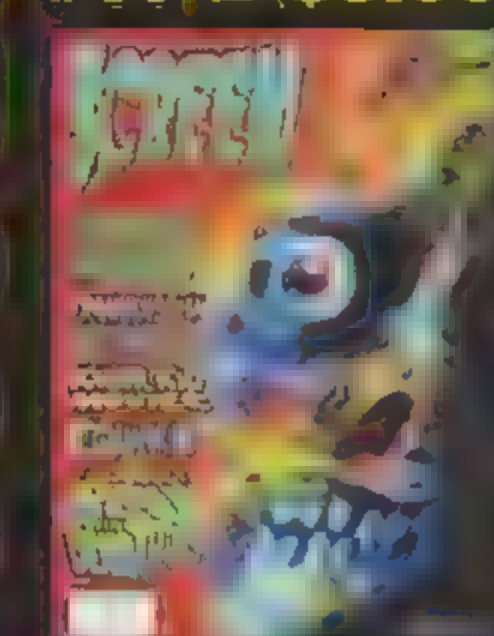
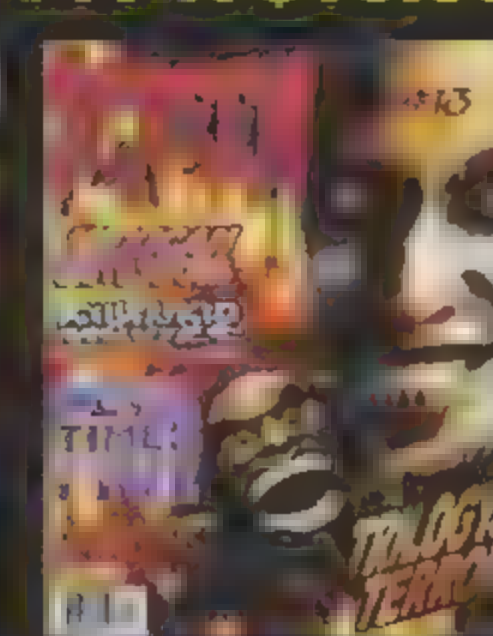
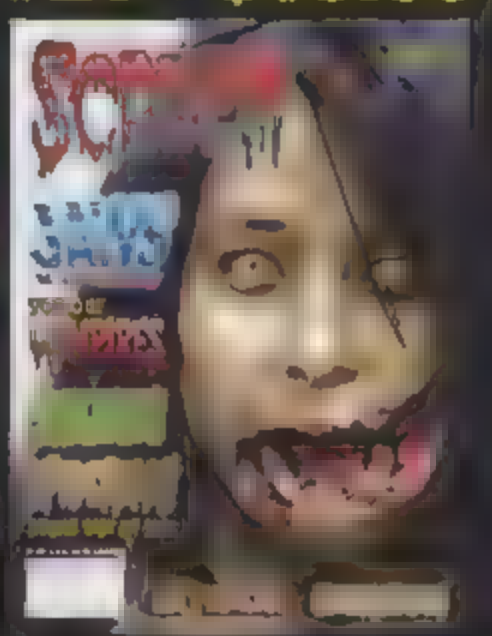
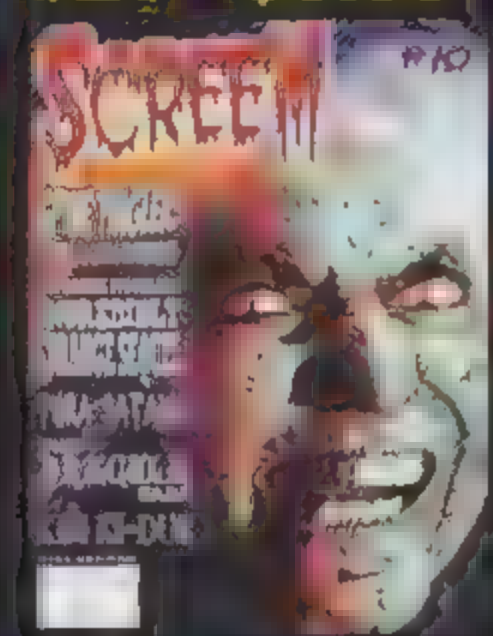
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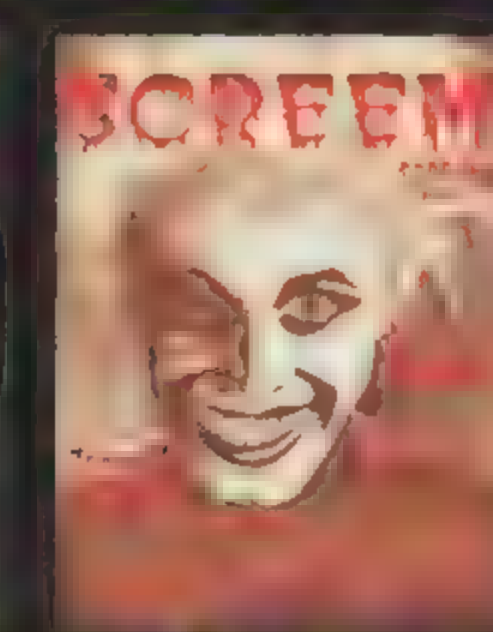
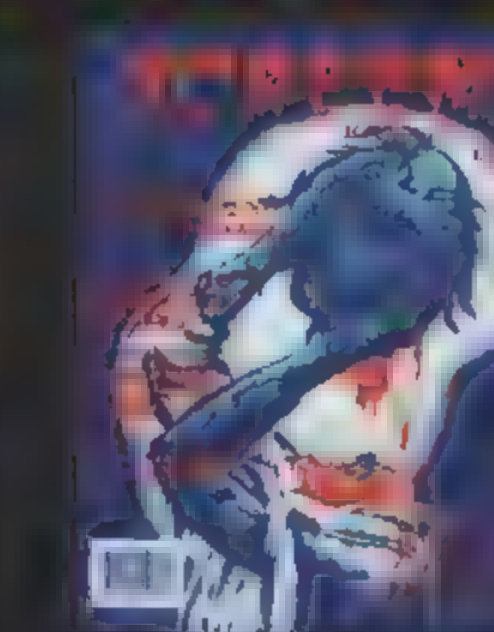
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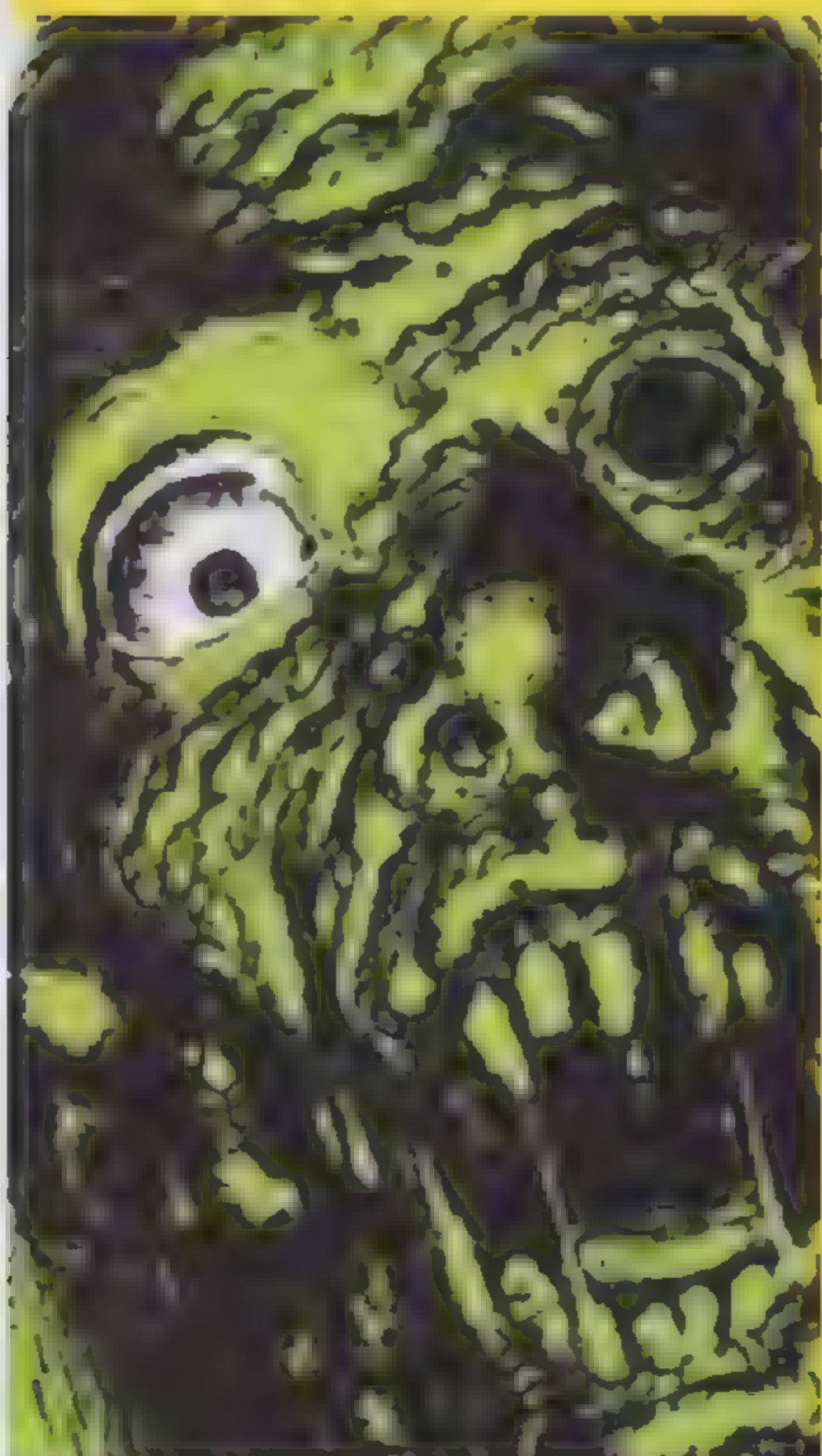
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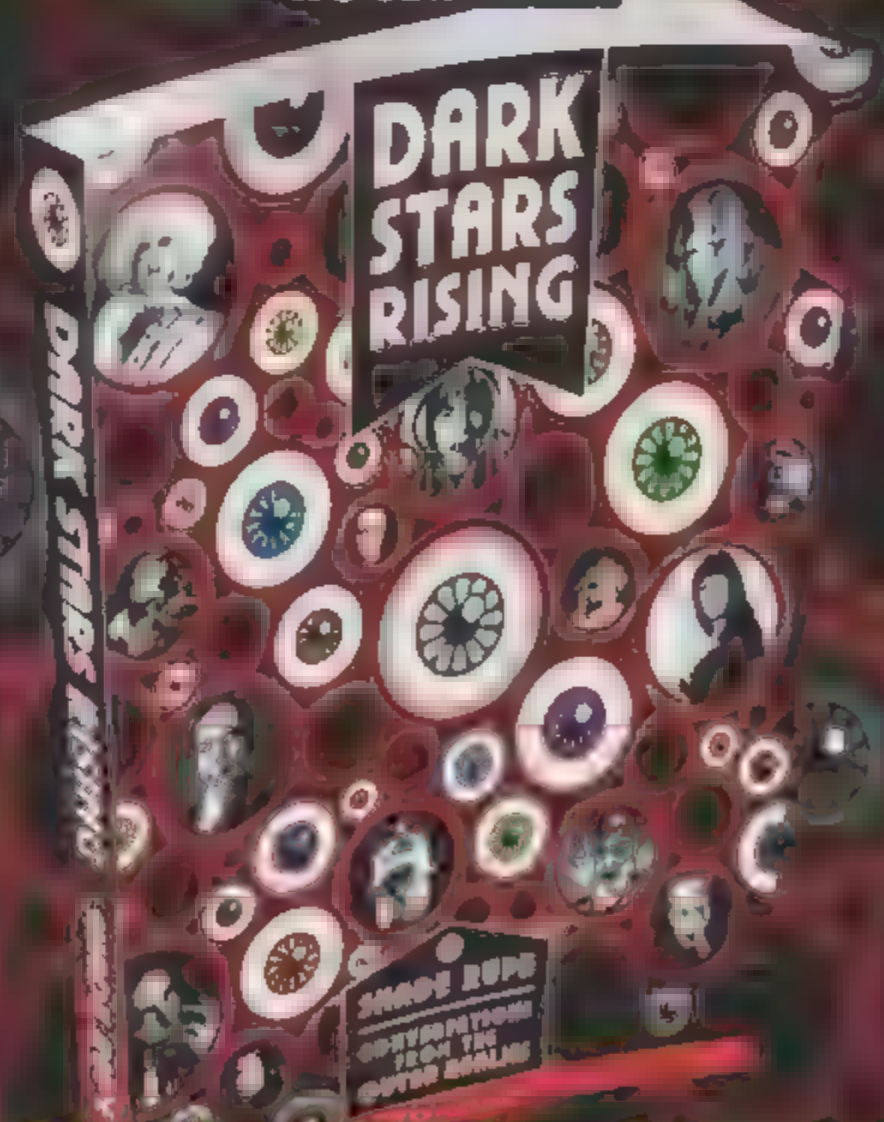
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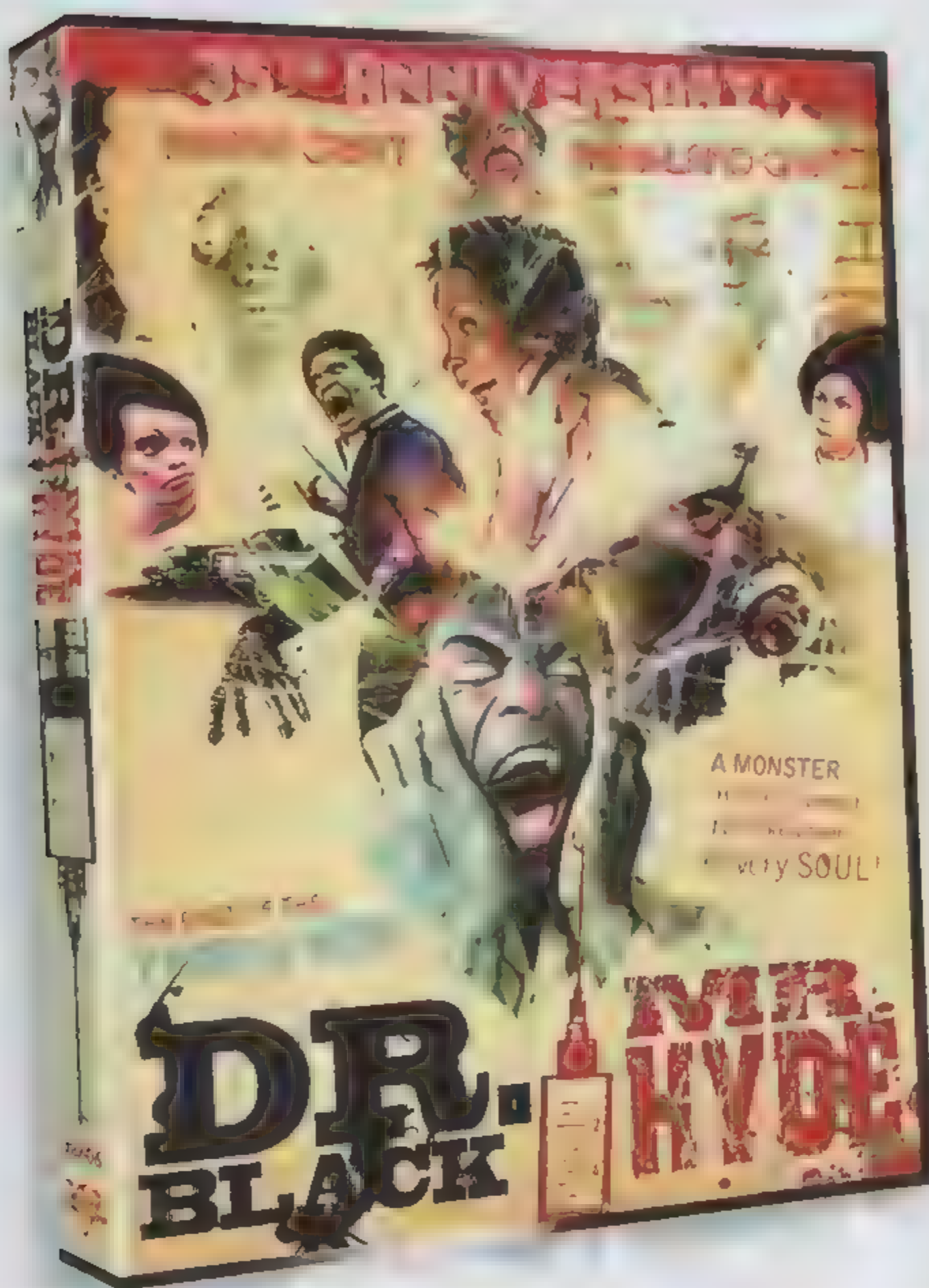


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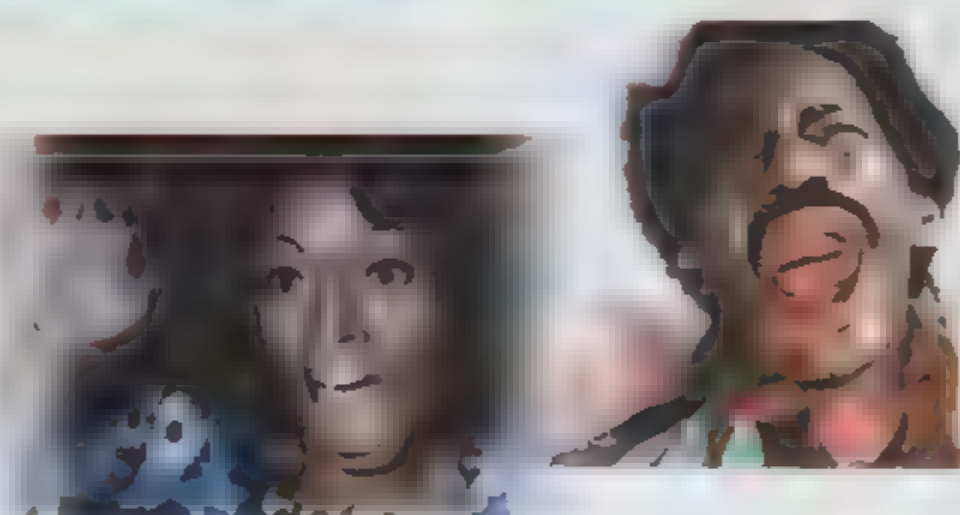
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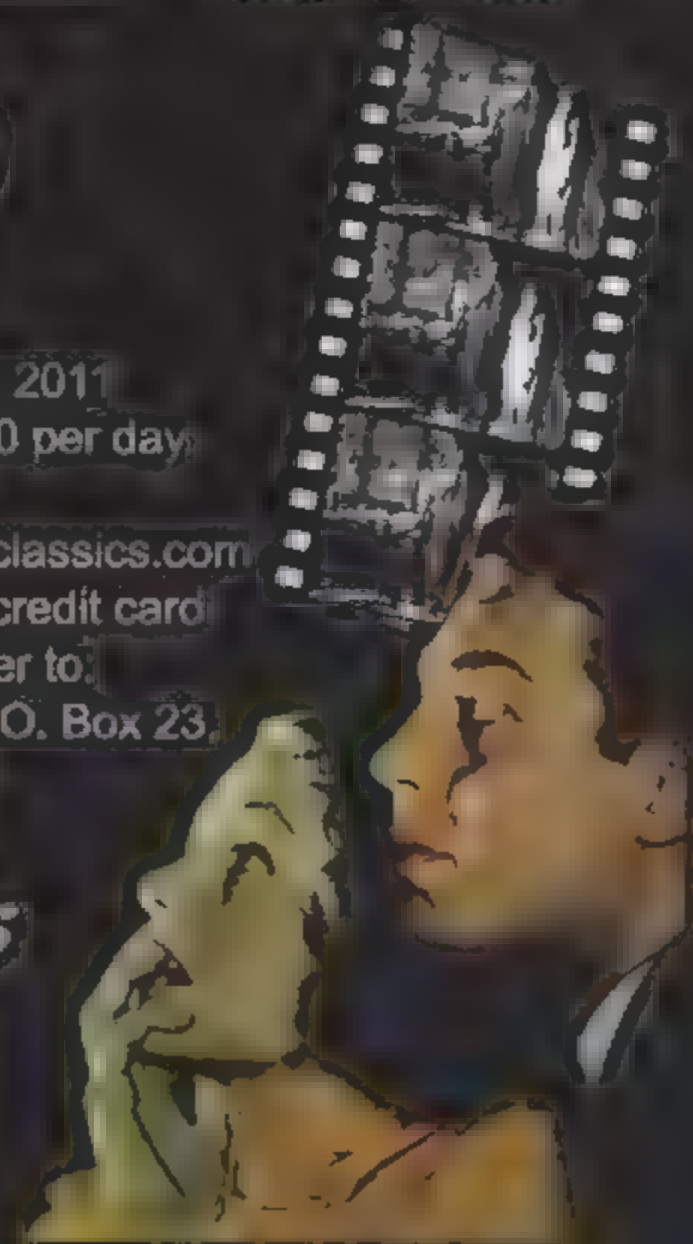
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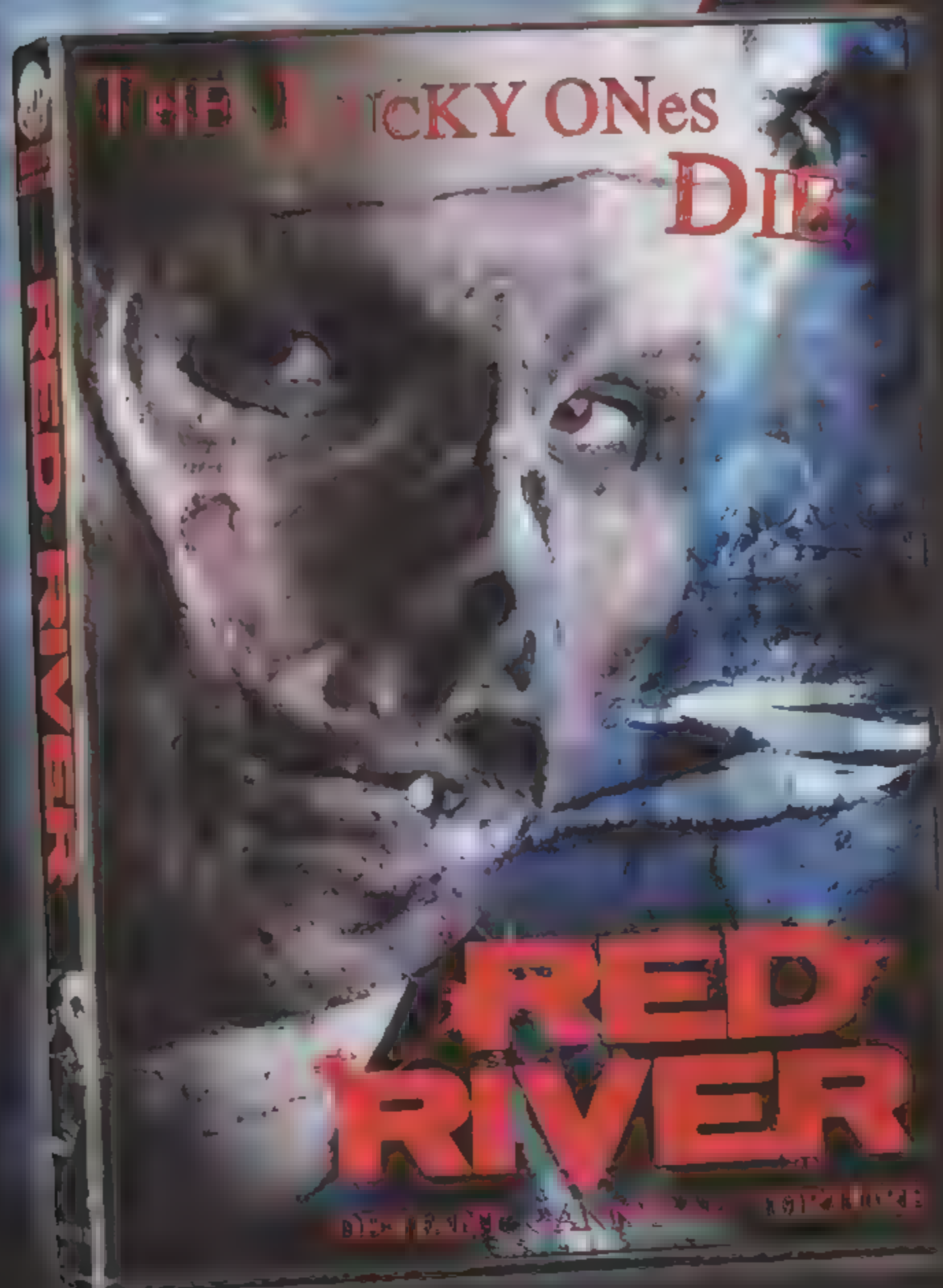
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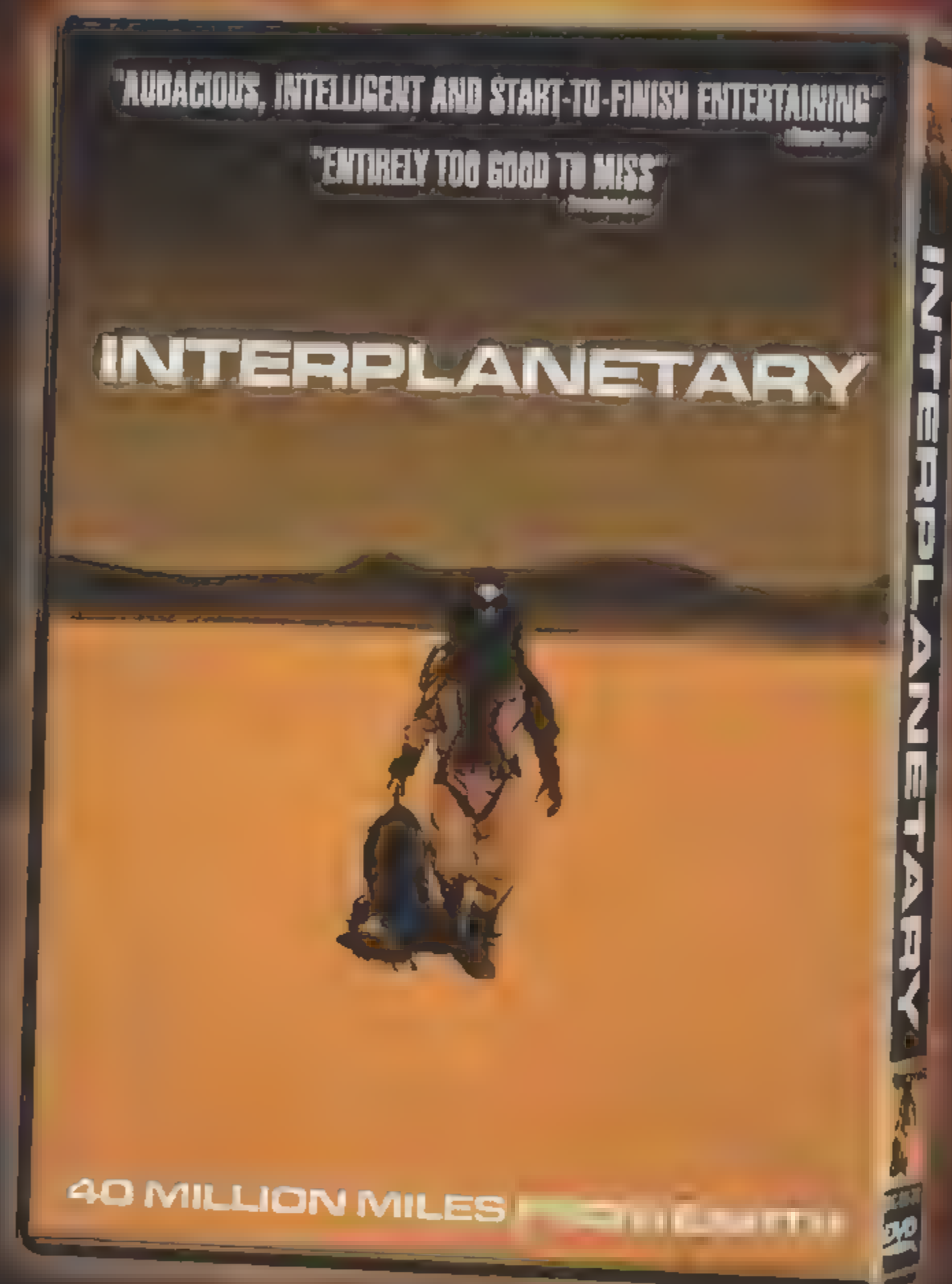
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# NAKED TERROR: PLAYBOY PLAYMATES IN HORROR FILMS PART 2

By Joe Wawrzyniak

*Editor's note: Joe Wawrzyniak continues his extensive retrospective in the second installment of Playboy Playmates who've appeared in horror films.*

## THE 1970's

### Sharon Clark

**Playboy info:** Miss August 1970; named Playmate of the Year in 1971 (at age 27 Sharon was the oldest woman to hold this particular title until her record was broken fifteen years later).

**Notable horror credit:** Small part in the '96 made-for-TV supernatural fright feature *The Uninvited*.

**DVD availability:** *The Uninvited* is available on DVD under the alternate title of *Victim of the Haunt* on the BFS Entertainment label.

**Where is she now?** Your guess is as good as mine.

### Mary and Madeleine Collinson

**Playboy info:** Miss Octobers 1970; first pair of identical twin sisters to pose for a joint pictorial as Playmates.

**Notable horror credit:** Mary and Madeleine starred as the titular radically contrasting lookalike siblings in the typically fine Hammer outing *Twins of Evil*.

**DVD availability:** A much requested title for fans in the U.S., they can finally sink their teeth into *Twins of Evil* as the film is coming soon on Blu-ray and DVD courtesy of Synapse Films.

**Where are they now?** Mary lives in Milan, Italy, while Madeleine resides in Malta.



Double your pleasure . . . the Collinson twins (the evil variety, of course!)

### Vicki Peters

**Playboy info:** Miss April 1972

**Notable horror credits:** Starred as the sweet Gail Waterman in the trashy Crown International murder mystery thriller *Blood Mania* and portrayed a crazed hippie cult member in the equally lurid *The Manson Massacre*.

**DVD availability:** *Blood Mania* oozed its scuzzy way onto DVD on both the Rhino and BCI Eclipse labels, while *The Manson Massacre* has yet to terrorize viewers on DVD.

**Where is she now?** Vicki now lives in Los Angeles and works for a real estate firm.

### Carol O'Neal

**Playboy info:** Miss July 1972

**Notable horror credit:** Had a small part in the harrowing psycho slasher *When a Stranger Calls*.

**DVD availability:** *When a Stranger Calls* was unleashed on DVD by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment in 2006.

**Where is she now?** Unknown.

### Merci Montello

**Playboy info:** Miss December 1972 (as Mercy Rooney)

**Notable horror credit:** Popped up briefly as the first victim in the enjoyable proto-slasher drive-in opus *The Singles Girls*, which stars fellow Playboy Playmate Claudia Jennings in the lead.

**DVD availability:** *The Singles Girls* has yet to make its swingin' way onto DVD.

**Where is she now?** Dropped out of sight after divorcing Mickey Rooney, Jr

### Julie Woodson

**Playboy info:** Miss April 1973; was the third African-American woman to be a Playmate of the Month.

**Notable horror credit:** Sole foray into acting was as Doshan in the nifty made-for-TV creature feature *The Bermuda Depths*.

**DVD availability:** After years of floating around in bootleg format on the grey market, *The Bermuda Depths* has finally surfaced on DVD-R from the Warner Archive Collection.

**Where is she now?**

Works in construction in her native Kansas.

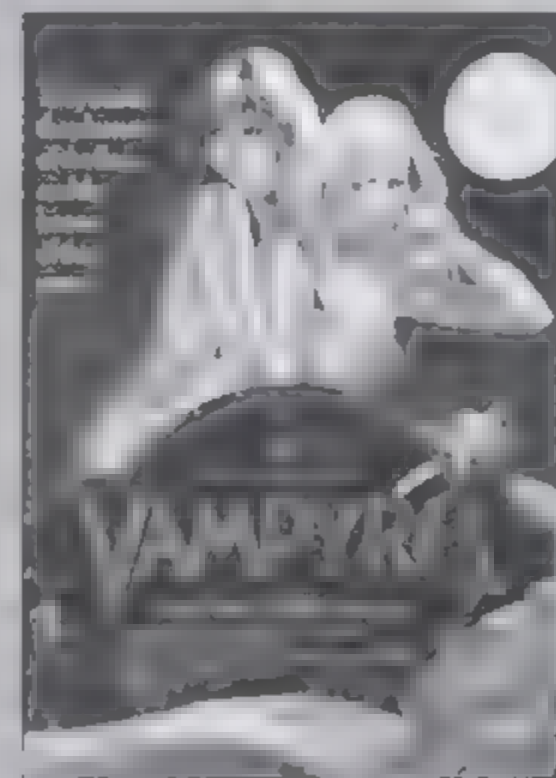
### Anulka Dziubinska

**Playboy info:** Miss May 1973; worked as a black Bunny for five months at the Playboy Club in London, England.

**Notable horror credit:** Steamed up the screen with her scorching hot portrayal of Miriam, the more aggressive and frightening of the two bisexual bloodsucker babes in Jose Roman Larraz's soft-core horror cult classic *Vampyres*.

**DVD availability:** *Vampyres* can fog up your TV screen in either the DVD or Blu-ray formats thanks to those fine folks at Blue Underground. The still-adorable Anulka is interviewed on the DVD in a nifty retrospective featurette, along with her equally fetching co-star Marianne Morris. Said DVD also boasts a great Anulka photo gallery with loads of sweet spicy pictures.

**Where is she now?** Works as a florist in California.





## Ruthy Ross

**Playboy info:** Miss June 1973; worked as a Bunny at the Playboy Clubs in Kansas City, Missouri and Los Angeles.

**Notable horror credits:** Popped up as a groupie in Brian De Palma's outrageous horror musical gem *Phantom of the Paradise* and played one of the sexy men's magazine models in the splendidly sleazy drive-in slasher *The Centerfold Girls*.

**DVD availability:** 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment issued a disappointing no-frills DVD of *Phantom* in the U.S. (fans should seek the French import disc, which contains many extras that Fox abandoned domestically). Fortunately, a nice quality DVD of *The Centerfold Girls* was released by Dark Sky Films.

**Where is she now?** Current whereabouts unknown.

## Martha Smith

**Playboy info:** Miss July 1973

**Notable horror credit:** Acted alongside Michael Moriarty in the enjoyable mystery thriller *Blood Link*.

**DVD availability:** *Blood Link* has yet to receive an official Region 1 DVD release.

**Where is she now?** Took a hiatus from acting to sell real estate in the late 90s, but has since resumed her acting career

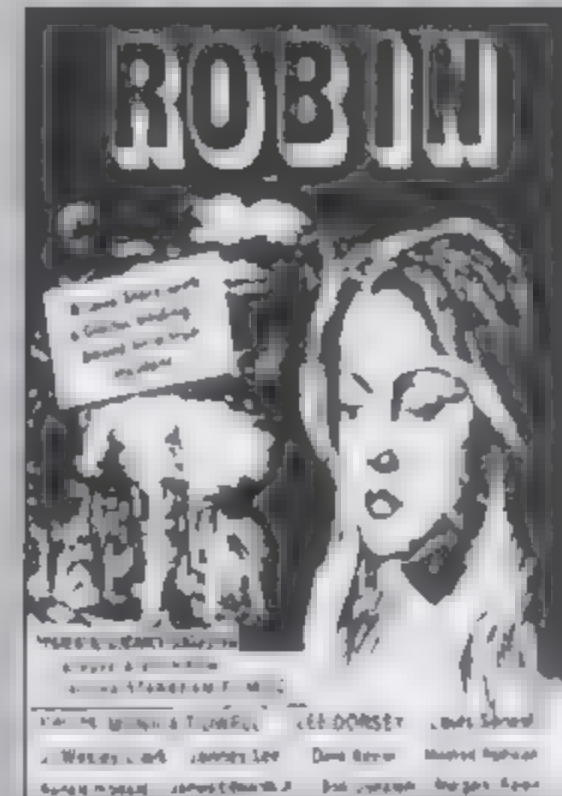
## Monica Tidwell

**Playboy info:** Miss November 1973; was the first Playmate featured in the magazine that was younger than *Playboy* itself.

**Notable horror credits:** Tidwell appeared in the obscure occult flick *Suicide Cult*, the Gothic film *Robin*, and the painfully unfunny horror comedy *Nocturna: Granddaughter of Dracula*.

**DVD availability:** Neither movie has yet to be released on DVD.

**Where is she now?** More recently Monica was one of the primary producers of the Off-Broadway play *Mindgame*, which starred Keith Carradine and was directed by none other than Ken Russell.



## Sandy Johnson

**Playboy info:** Miss June 1974

**Notable horror credits:** Was famously killed during the startling opening of John Carpenter's trailblazing slasher classic *Halloween* (she's Michael Myers' ill-fated older sister Judith), and has a small role as a ballroom dancer in Mel Brooks' goofy spoof *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*.

**DVD availability:** *Halloween* has been released on DVD and Blu-ray by Anchor Bay so many times that I've lost count, while *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* was issued on DVD by Warner Home Video.

**Where is she now?** Beats the hell out of me!

## Jeane Manson

**Playboy info:** Miss August 1974 (as Jean Manson)

**Notable horror credit:** Was severely mistreated by misogynistic psycho sicko Andrew Prine in *Barn of the Naked Dead*.

**DVD availability:** *Barn of the Naked Dead* (aka *Terror Circus*) oozed its slimy way onto DVD on both the Legend House and Code Red labels.

**Where is she now?** Jeane lives in France, and has had a very successful singing career



## Laura Misch Owens

**Playboy info:** Miss February 1975 (as Laura Misch)

**Notable horror credits:** Had an unbilled bit part in the trashy *Crypt of Dark Secrets* and played an evil prostitute, who gets carved up by a deranged religious fanatic, in the even sleazier splatter clunker *Mardi Gras Massacre*.

**DVD availability:** *Crypt of Dark Secrets* can be relished in all its tacky glory on a DVD double bill with *The Naked Witch* from Something Weird Video, while *Mardi Gras Massacre* has yet to receive a quality, legitimate Region 1 DVD release.

**Where is she now?** Laura now lives in Colorado and writes for the local newspaper *The Denver Post*.

## Lynn Theel

**Playboy info:** Miss July 1975 (as Lynn Schiller)

**Notable horror credits:** Was raped by one of the mutant monstrosities in the marvelously tasteless *Humanoids from the Deep* (she's the hapless lass who gives birth to a fanged baby beast at the very end of the film) and played David Caruso's girlfriend in Greydon Clark's fun sci-fi/horror opus *Without Warning*. Moreover, footage of Theel from *Humanoids from the Deep* was used in Jim Wynorski's remake of *Not of This Earth* with Traci Lords.

**DVD availability:** *Humanoids from the Deep* are rampaging their way once again on DVD, courtesy of those fine folks at Shout! Factory, who also brought us *Not of This Earth* on DVD as well. Unfortunately, *Without Warning* hasn't landed on Region 1 DVD.

**Where is she now?** Lynn now lives in Hyannis, Massachusetts.



Lynn Theel, unreal! Two very different pics of Lynn from Roger Corman's *Humanoids from the Deep*.



## Laura Lyons

**Playboy info:** Miss February 1976

**Notable horror credit:** Appeared in the sleazy Mexican *Jaws* rip-off *Tintorera*.

**DVD availability:** A two-hour plus extended version of this dreary stinker was issued on DVD by the label Desert Mountain.

**Where is she now?** Lyons now lives in Los Angeles, California.

## Susan Lynn Kiger

**Playboy info:** Miss January 1977

**Notable horror credit:** Played a waitress in the crummy slasher dud *Death Screams*.

**DVD availability:** A cut and muddy version of *Death Screams* was released on DVD by the third-rate label Madacy Entertainment in 2009 as part of a five-film box set called *Death Scream*.

**Where is she now?** Susan now lives in Southern California.

## Pamela Jean Bryant

**Playboy info:** Miss April 1978

**Notable horror credit:** Portrayed luckless model victim Sue Ellen in the Crown International flick *Don't Answer the Phone!*

**DVD availability:** Previously available in a heavily edited-for-TV version by Rhino, *Don't Answer the Phone!* rang its way to DVD from BCI Eclipse, and features an interview with star Nicholas Worth as well as an enjoyable commentary by writer/director Robert Hammer that's moderated by frequent *Scream* contributor Shane M. Dallmann.

**Where is she now?** Died at age 51 from an asthma attack on December 4, 2010.



Pamela Jean Bryant obviously answered the phone . . .

## Rosanne Katon

**Playboy info:** Miss September 1978

**Notable horror credit:** Portrayed one of the hookers in the uproarious horror black comedy *Motel Hell*.

**DVD availability:** *Motel Hell* was delivered on DVD by MGM on a double feature with *Deranged*.

**Where is she now?** Is a community activist in Southern California.

## Marcy Hanson



## Marcy Hanson

**Playboy info:** Miss October 1978

**Notable horror credit:** Had a small part in Jeff Lieberman's terrific homicidal hippie horror gem *Blue Sunshine*.

**DVD availability:** *Blue Sunshine* was unleashed on DVD by Synapse Films.

**Where is she now?** Marcy continues to work as a model and runs a bed and breakfast establishment in her native Galveston, Texas.

## Monique St. Pierre

**Playboy info:** Miss November 1978; named Playmate of the Year in 1979.

**Notable horror credit:** Played the other hooker in *Motel Hell*.

**DVD availability:** *Motel Hell* appears on a double bill with *Deranged* as part of MGM's *Midnite Movie DVD* series.

**Where is she now?** Last reported working as a costume designer



Missy Cleveland, gone, but not forgotten. She appeared in Brian De Palma's *Blow Out*.

## Missy Cleveland

**Playboy info:** Miss April 1979

**Notable horror credit:** Had a memorable bit as the actress who can't scream for beans in Brian De Palma's superior thriller *Blow Out*.

**DVD availability:** *Blow Out* was issued on DVD by MGM.

**Where is she now?** Missy died at the tragically young age of 41 from an adverse reaction to prescription medication on August 14, 2001

## Ursula Buchfellner

**Playboy info:** Miss October 1979 (Miss December 1977, German edition of *Playboy*—age 16!)

**Notable horror credit:** Played the lead role as a kidnapped model in Jess Franco's typically gross and offensive cannibal jungle horror outing *The Devil Hunter*. Ursula also appeared in Franco's *Sadomania* (1981).

**DVD availability:** *The Devil Hunter* reared its foul head on DVD in 2008 from Severin Films. *Sadomania* is available on DVD from Blue Underground.



Jess Franco favorite Ursula Buchfellner as she appeared in the opening credits of *The Devil Hunter*.

**We'll continue with 80s Playmates in *Scream* #23.**





# Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio:

## THE ENCHANTING WORLD OF SHAW BROTHERS HORROR PART 2

BY MICHAEL THOMASON

### Studio in Decline: The End of an Era

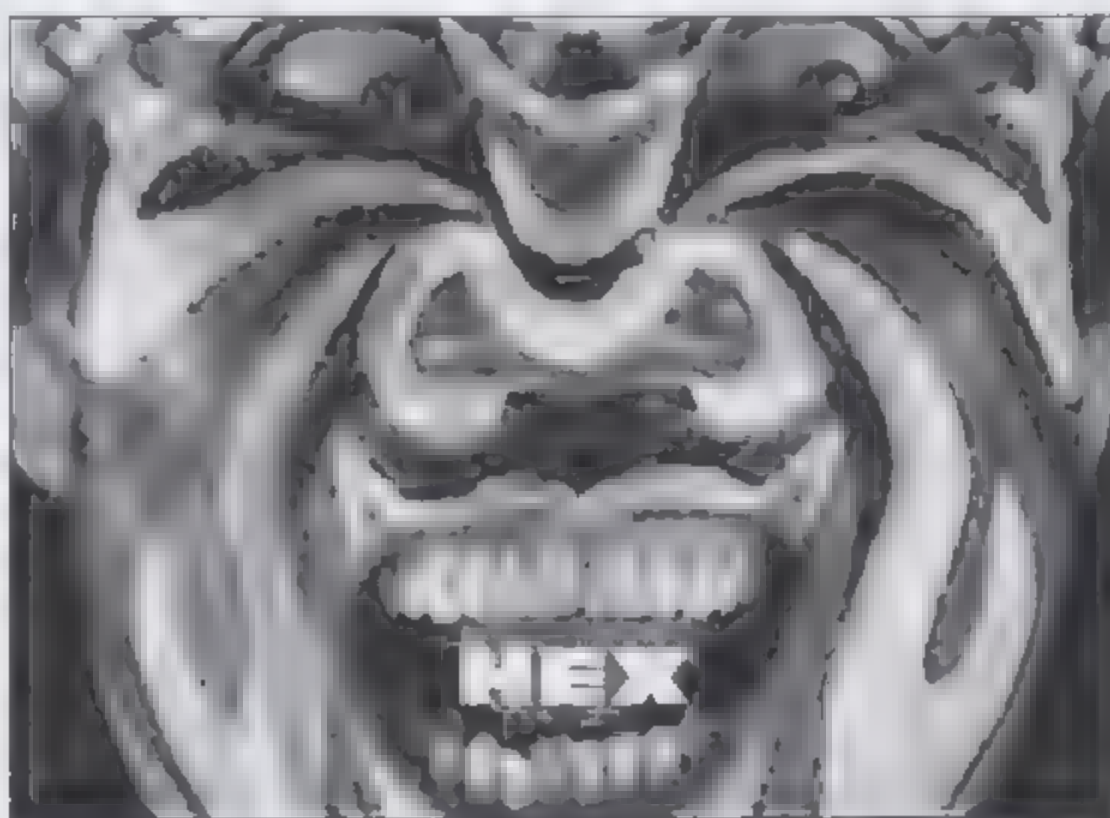
By the turn of the new decade, shifting into the eighties, Shaw Brothers Studios had engendered some healthy competition from rival studio *Golden Harvest*, who had made inroads into the domestic market by focusing on producing Cantonese language features (where the Shaws had been the primary proponent of the Mandarin language), thereby winning marketshare with films post-synched in the local dialect, as well tailoring their productions towards key areas of interest to the domestic audiences that the Shaws were gradually falling out of touch with. New studios started popping up too, often smaller independents, looking for their own piece of the box office pie, and the introduction of series formats into local television productions had locals staying at home to watch their favorite small screen stars over venturing out for the once family-outing that was a night at the pictures.

As interest in period martial arts films began to wane, with rising star Jackie Chan (who was contracted to competitor *Golden Harvest*) having injected a healthy dose of humor into the already stale martial arts formula, the Shaw studios struggled to maintain their long held dominance over the Hong Kong box office. Kung fu comedies became the new kid on the Shaw backlot, and expansion into other (newly popular) genres, such as crime dramas, became the edict from the top. By 1981, the luxury of shooting in the once glorious anamorphic ShawScope process was also dropped, as eventual television sales meant spherical films (in the 1.85 aspect ratio) would be easier to convert for the (then) uniform 4:3 television screen ratio. In the long-term, it would prove a losing battle for the Shaws' theatrical arm to keep its head above water, and its now dated production ethic to keep ahead of its competitors, but before the doors closed for an extended hiatus, the Shaw Brothers managed to breathe one last valiant breath into the local horror industry.

Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955) has given birth to numerous imitators over the years as well as become the template for more thrillers from more countries than one could possibly collate, so it was only natural that eventually the Shaw Brothers themselves would churn out their own remake, and that came in the belated form of Kuei Chih Hung's *Hex* (1980). The daughter of a wealthy family, Chan Sau Ying (Tanny Tien Ni) finds herself in the clutches of slow death from tuberculosis, as well as an abusive marriage to an alcoholic husband, Yeung Chun Yu (Wang Jung). When a new maid, Yi Wah (Chen Szu Chia), arrives, the two end up conspiring to off the husband, which they succeed in doing one storm-drenched night. It's not long before Sau Ying starts dreading that Chun Yu may not have died that night, or if he did, then his vengeful corpse may be haunting the grounds of their mansion, seeking ghostly retribution.

Beautifully shot by cinematographer Li Hsin Yeh, Kuei's *Hex* is an effective Chinese update of Clouzot's *Les Diabolique*, and anyone who has ever seen that groundbreaking slice of French cinema will know exactly where the plot is going once the husband *does* rise from the dead. What they probably *won't* see however is how Kuei's utilizes his progenitor as the springboard for a double-twist, and how he subtly sets up that double-twist by echoing the mirror motif from Dario Argento's *Deep Red* (1975) in a throwaway reference very early in the film. Add to that a finale that shamelessly lifts the shock climax from the "Hoichi the Earless" episode of Masaki Kobayashi's *Kwaidan* (1964), albeit with the addition of an elderly Taoist mistress, her writhing, naked female assistant

and more gratuitous (female) nudity from the lead actress' body double, and you've a rendition of a French classic that only Hong Kong could produce. The naked female assistant's lengthy "ritual" dance routine at the climax comes way out of left field and could only be any more at odds with all that has gone before had pole-dancing been the rage with strippers in 1980, as only then would the "ritualistic" component of the performance belie its true origins. It's almost as if Runme Shaw saw a rough-cut and said "not enough sex and violence—spice it up!" but ultimately *Hex* is a uniquely Chinese variation on its source material, has atmosphere to spare and is never boring or stumbles on the way to its outlandish conclusion.

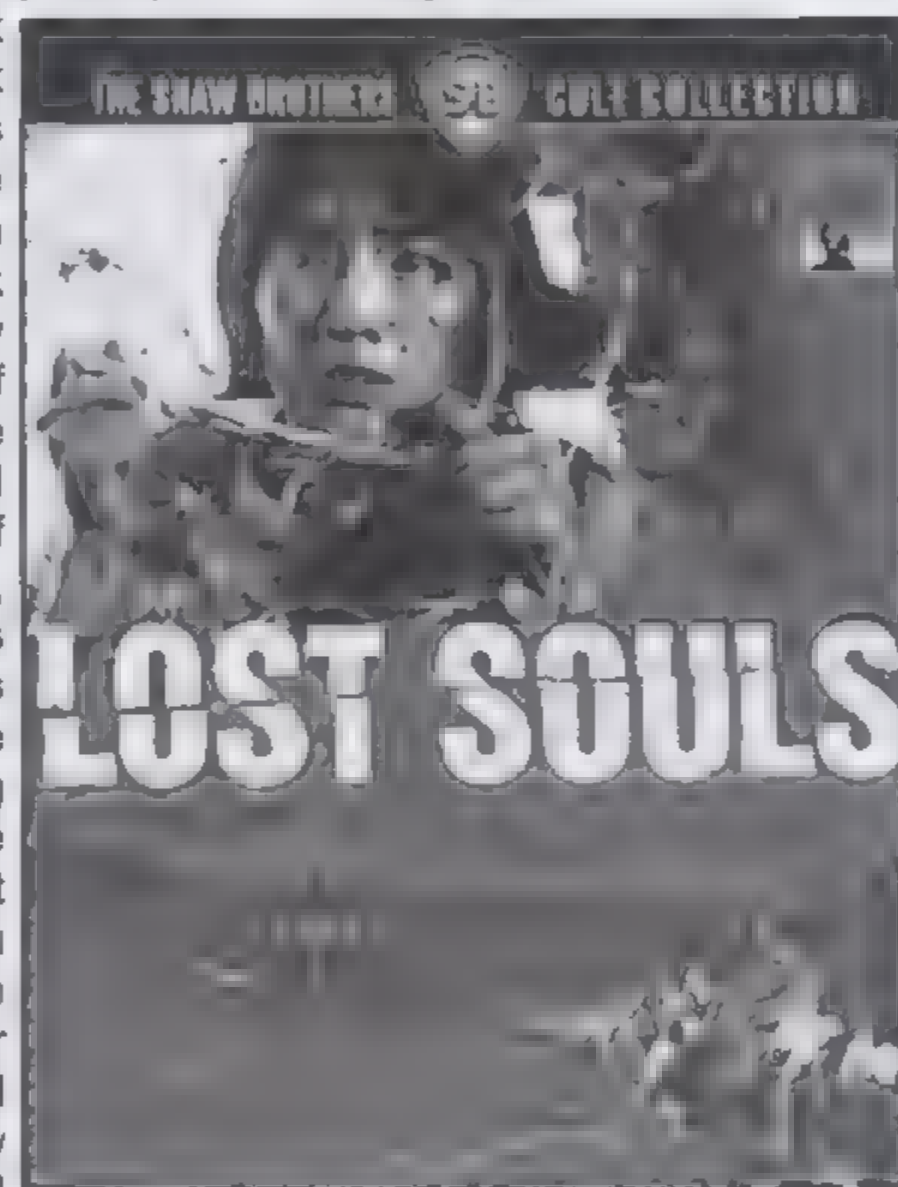


If only the same could be said of its sequel of the same year encoring director Kuei's oddball horror-comedy *Hex vs. Witchcraft* (1980), a film whose only relation to its predecessor is the name check it gets in the English language title (the Chinese title translates as "Evil fighting Evil"). Transpiring the broadest tangent imaginable, the successive *Hex* film follows the exploits of staggeringly unlucky gambler Cai (James Yi Lui) who racks up a fortune in debts, bungles the cancelling of his debt with casino boss Brother Nine (Chan Shen, 1940-1984) after he offers him a night with his wife that goes sour, and winds up committing to a suicide pact as a means of finalizing out all his worldly debts. As (bad) luck would have it, he happens on a bag of jewellery whilst trying to off himself, which proves to be the possession of an elderly gent (Yang Chih Ching) who offers him a strange proposal. If he should marry the wandering spirit of his daughter then all of their wealth inclusive of an expensive flat and cash shall be his. Naturally, Cai agrees and feels pretty satisfied with himself and his windfall, until he discovers the spirit is real and is committed to holding him to his marriage vows.

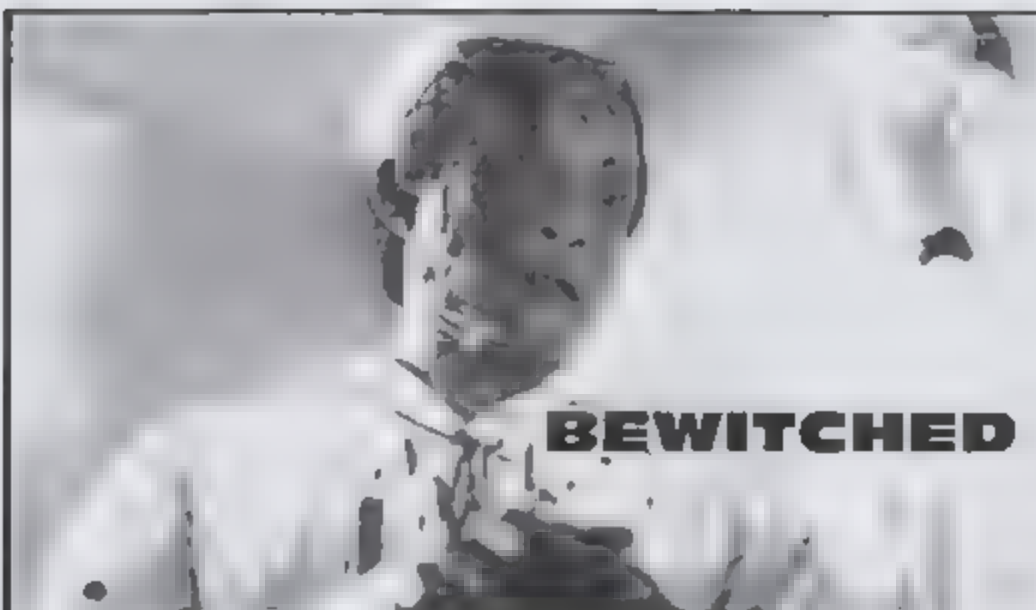
Clearly, the horror element is largely peripheral and the film bogs itself down in plenty of colloquial humor, gambling table antics, and unrelated gratuitous nudity. The *ghost marriage* ideal was taken to awesomely eerie heights in Kelvin Tong's Singaporean shocker *The Maid* (2005) almost two decades later but herein everything's played strictly for laughs and local comedian James Yi Lui makes for a terribly bland leading man. The only real highlight is the appearance of Shaw sexpot Shirley Yu at the film's climax, but even by then it's a case of too little, too late. Kuei's successive *Hex After Hex* (1982) would result in the ghost-marriage motif becoming a mere plot device as a platform into straight comedy, and painful comedy at that.

The exploitation juggernaut that would close out the first year of the eighties, as well as end its director's career with the Shaw studios was Mou Tun Fei's *Lost Souls* (1980), a stark and shocking allegory concerning itself in the affairs of illegal refugees and the people smugglers that prey on and exploit them. In the annals of the Shaw Brothers Studios, there would never be a film as shocking or confronting as Mou's swan song with the studios; even today, few Hong Kong productions match the sheer ferocity and blatant offensiveness of what Mou achieved with his exploitation masterpiece. Unlike their Western counterparts, most all Hong Kong studios (Shaw Brothers included) financed and distributed films, giving their directors virtual *carte blanche* to go away and film whatever they saw fit and come back with a finished film. Thus, one can only imagine the absolute horror with which Mou was met by his producers at Shaw when he came back with a production that not only carried a cast of amateur actors and wall-to-wall sex and nudity, but also a provocative and confronting political message (which was a strong taboo in Hong Kong cinema of the day, carrying on, albeit in diminished strength, well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century). Mou's contract with the studios was axed and the film virtually buried.

The closest thing international viewers will ever see to a Hong Kong variant on Pasolini's *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), Mou defied convention and brought his concerns over the steady influx of illegal immigrants and their exploitation, in the oft-most shocking fashion imaginable. There really is no other genre that befits *Lost Souls* more directly than that of the horror genre, as it is too exploitative to be considered a strict political drama, too sadistic and brutal to slot into the sexploitation bracket, and too subversive in its political analogies to fall anywhere else. What the prospective viewer encounters is a group of illegal immigrants rounded up the moment their waterlogged feet hit shore, shuffled off to a detention camp like cattle, and then beaten, raped, abused, brutalized, humiliated and murdered by their captors (as a means to extort money from relatives for their "promised" release) for the better part of ninety minutes. The film just shocks and bludgeons its viewer over the head tirelessly, as it piles one depravity on another until the overall wallowing in excess, sadism and sexual deviancy just becomes surreal. The film harbors an intensity unique in the Shaw canon, and to experience it is akin to experiencing blunt force trauma to one's senses. Mou's film is a strong, uncompromising and uniformly bleak exercise in exhibiting the unrelenting horror and degradation that humans are sometimes wont to force upon their fellow man and is only recommended for the steely of disposition as much of its content is designed with the sole intent to offend and provoke a strong reaction on its viewer







By comparison, Kuei Chih Hung's Southeast Asian black magic opus *Bewitched* (1981) is almost a breath of fresh air, grisly as it is, against Mou's pinnacle of the Hong Kong exploitation machine. On the back of the discovery of a little girl's corpse, police detective Bobby Wong (Melvin Wong) links the body back to Stephen Lam (Ai Fei), the girl's father. The courts hand down the death sentence for his crime, and from his cell he requests an audience with Detective Wong to impart how he came to be in his predicament. His story recounts a trip to Thailand and his involvement with a local girl who, when he returned to Hong Kong and wife and family, recruited the services of a local sorcerer to place a curse on him. Finding an element of believability in his tale, Wong jets off to Thailand to investigate further ultimately crossing paths with the same sorcerer who turned Lam's life upside down.

Grounding itself in the same Southeast Asian mystique and mysticism that had proved so popular with Ho Meng Hua's seventies *Black Magic* shockers, Kuei's *Bewitched* sets itself apart from many of its peers by delving deeply into the sorcerer and combatant shaman's rituals and playing them out at length onscreen so as to give the viewer a clearer understanding of the black arts, as well as display with unflinching grotesquery the often unorthodox execution of said rituals. And just to spice up the proceedings, he also throws in a healthily dubious dose of gratuitous sex and nudity to keep the pace from flagging, should the lengthy rituals provoke a sense of overkill. A clear favorite of this (re)viewer, *Bewitched* held my attention because of the extensive display of the rituals involved and their transition into curses and, like similar productions, it layers itself in more than enough exploitative elements (i.e: copious sex and gore) to heighten the disgust and titillation factor. Unusually, being that the key focus of the plot is concentrated on Thailand, the production enlisted the services of a "genuine" Malaysian bomoh, Hussein bin Abu Hassan, to essay the evil sorcerer Magusu, as well as lend authenticity to the various incantations and rituals shown throughout the film. Hassan delivers a spirited performance, and makes for the perfect villain against Buddhist Master Da More (Choi Kwok Hing) come the film's dynamic climactic duel.

A lesser though more than effective, enterprise had come about earlier in the year also from in-house director Kuei, in the shape of gruesome serial-killer shocker *Corpse Mania* (1981), and probably would have been overlooked in the contemporary shuffle had not U.S. company *Image Entertainment* rescued it from obscurity and afforded it a DVD release. Though it had played various international film festivals on release, and was sold in a number of territories, when it was eventually released on the home digital medium, Celestial Pictures only saw fit to instruct their distributor to put the title out in VCD format as they considered it inconsequential enough to forego a Hong Kong DVD debut. A spritely tale of a necrophiliac madman who, when released from an asylum and cheated of his money by a cunning brothel madam, commences a campaign of slaughter against those who had wronged him and the madam's prostitutes, *Corpse Mania* is short, punchy and to the point.

Tanny Tien Ni is virtually pitch-perfect as deceitful brothel owner Madam Lan, and Wang Jung a fine foil as stoic police chief Zhang who links the initial murder to one that had occurred in another province some time before. The titular necrophilia angle is merely the primary hook designed to play audience expectation into something more perverse than what actually follows and, although the details of the villain of the piece's unnatural obsession are addressed, never dwelt upon in such detail as to overwhelm the central murder-mystery plot line that is so important to delivering the film's startling twist-ending. Along the way, Kuei engineers some evocative set pieces and scenes, prowling the foggy alleyways of the town as the murderer flitters around in the shadows, and showcasing a bloody stabbing in a car (an image of which, the squashed blood-spattered face of the victim against a window, would go on to become synonymous with the film in its advertising). There is also the jarring moment where a severed head draws its last breath as the camera zooms into the unexpected look of shock on its face post-decapitation. Underappreciated, underrated and largely unseen, *Corpse Mania* well deserves re-evaluation thanks to Image's rescue of it for the digital domain.

Taking a page out of *Finger of Doom* and *The Devil's Mirror's* book, another few late period martial arts productions also went the genre cross-pollination route mixing up horror aesthetics with sword fighting intrigue. These were Hua Shan's *Bloody Parrot* (1981), Sun Chung's *Human Lanterns* (1982) and Hua's successive *Portrait in Crystal* (1983). All firmly entrenched in their martial arts origins, the films collectively shoehorn in more than enough gratuitous nudity and horror trappings (as well as outrageous gore) to make them something more than simple tail end flailing death-throes of their primary genre. *Human Lanterns* is well-known for its blend of martial arts intrigue, plentiful sword fighting and grisly skin stripping and mutilation sequences, yet *Parrot* and *Portrait* have remained relatively obscure even though they remain widely commercially available. *Parrot* is a murder-mystery set against a period martial arts background enlivened by several gory combat sequences, naked demonic possession, revolting autopsies and an overall permeating atmosphere of darkness engendered through its black magic themes.

Whereas *Portrait* fills its brief running time with exploding bodies, vomit-induced death, crucifixion and wire-net torture and a leading villainess in the form of a witch, *Parrot* and *Portrait* are often cited as amongst the poorest of the *wuxia* genre, and also the weaker of the late period Shaw titles, but against those odds they entertain and ladle on more than enough blood and boobs to win them favor with the horror set. From the same period, Chor Yuen's *The Enchantress* (1983) pops up as an effects-laden precursor to the *Chinese Ghost Story* cycle that would follow a few years later. The influence of Tsui Hark's *Zu, Warriors of the Magic Mountain* (1983) is preeminent throughout, but the tale that Chor weaves of a warrior (Max Mok) who falls in love with a maiden (Jean Mary Reimer) much to the disdain of her mother, a bloodsucking, flesh-gobbling ghost, is pure escapist entertainment and rollicking good fun (with a horror slant).



As was becoming prevalent of the era, the next foray into the genre was the horror-comedy *The Fake Ghost Catchers* (1982) from director Liu Chia Yung, featuring Shaw superstar Alexander Fu Sheng (1954-1983) in a comedic supporting role. Taking royal advantage of the superstitious, "ghost catchers" Zhou Peng (David Cheung) and Bao Tao (Hsiao Ho) run a sneaky little business where they're not quite the authentic mediums they purport to be. Thus, imagine their surprise when they are called upon by the ghost of murdered maiden Huanzhu (Lily Li) for their assistance in dispelling the ghost of her fiancé, Du Luo (Lung Tien Hsiang), saving her very much alive sister (also Li) as a matter of course. Foolhardily accepting the request, they set out to put on a show with their dodgy wares, picking up opera performer Wu Sunchao (Alexander Fu Sheng) along the way. Imagine their even greater surprise when the ghostly Du Luo turns out to be both very real, and dangerously powerful well above the hokey tricks of their former showmanship. More comedy than horror Liu's venture is an enjoyable romp littered with green-lit ghosts, deft physical comedy, the odd showy martial arts display and an impressively mounted final act where the titular "ghost catchers" face off against their first real ghost. A lot of fun from go to whoa, *The Fake Ghost Catchers* predates *Mr. Vampire* and its ilk by a couple of years, and deserves respect for achieving what it does in the idiom of that genre ahead of the game, for that fact.

Before the sequel to Kuei Chih Hung's *Bewitched* would arrive on the scene, a minor demonic possession piece trounced through when Yang Chuan advised us that *Hell Has No Boundary* (1982), a minimalist horror diversion from the Shaws if ever there was one. On a camping trip, police officer Cheung's (Derek Yee) girlfriend May (Leanne Lau) is possessed by the spirit of her former life, still hell-bent on avenging herself in May's cycle against those who had brought her such a cruel and unpleasant end in her past life. May starts finding herself in a variety of strange incidences, and observant tabloid photographer Koo (Ken Tong) is positive something horribly errant is up with the female cop. Of course, he is more than right and much death, bloodshed, past-life regressions and Taoist rituals ensue.

*Hell* is, realistically, a bit of a "nothing" kind of film as far as the genre goes; its possession angle, though played straight, never once elicits the remotest of scares, and there's scarcely enough gore or usual titillation to raise the bar on what is already an exercise in startling mediocrity. Only the flashback to May's past-life, where the Japanese occupation meant rape and murder for Chinese women, or children were sold to smugglers to use their hollowed out body cavities to secret contraband across the border and their remains carved into anonymous chunks passed off as donkey meat by street hawkers, really leans towards generating the necessary horror or revulsion that one associates with Hong Kong horror of the period. Luckily for Cheung, his commanding officer (Yueh Hua) is a latent Taoist priest, which wraps things up nicely but closes the film in such perfunctory fashion that the overall lasting impression Yang's film leaves on its viewer is one of major disappointment and missed opportunity.

Most definitely not a missed opportunity is Kuei Chih Hung's sequel to his previous *Bewitched*, the black magic magnum opus *The Boxer's Omen* (1983). Originally intended as a continuation of evil-battling Buddhist monk Da More from *Bewitched*, Kuei's follow-up moves its attention to new character Chan Hung (Phillip Ko), whose brother took a savage beating in the ring during a tournament bout with Thai boxer Bu Bo (Bolo Yeung). Scooting off to Thailand to clear his



brother's name and issue a challenge of his own, Chan is visited upon by the soul of Abbot Qing Zhao (Elvis Tsui; taking over from Choi Kwok Hing) and it is revealed to him that the two are inextricably linked by a deadly curse. Twins in a previous life, Chan will suffer the same fate as the Abbot unless he enters the monastery, becoming a monk himself before entering into a life or death spiritual struggle with the evil sorcerer accountable for the oppressive spell.

Just like the over-quoted line from *Spinal Tap*, Kuei and his crew take everything that made *Bewitched* so memorable and then ratchet up the volume to eleven. *The Boxer's Omen* is one of those films so outrageous in its execution, and so over the top in its individual set pieces, that one can't help being anything but swallowed up in the sheer madness of it all. Steeped in Southeast Asian mysticism and superstition, the film is every part a twin to its predecessor (which may prove wearying for some viewers, as a strong suspension of disbelief and basic

understanding of Asian superstitions and beliefs certainly goes a long way toward not getting lost in the thick of the action), pulling out such a grotesque bag of tricks along the way that the average viewer will either be astounded by what they see, or deeply nauseated. Rotting food, meat and brain matter are consumed then regurgitated, Ko vomits up an eel, the sorcerer's head detaches and attacks Ko with its dangling tendrils and veins, a naked female zombie is birthed from the innards of a giant crocodile carcass, and monsters, goo, gore and creature puppets abound come the climactic duel. The film is just one mind-boggling parade of excess upon excess ad nauseum until the viewer becomes totally caught up in the surrealism of it all. Kuei affords his viewer some brief dialogue and sexy interludes to catch their breath, but overall *The Boxer's Omen* could only emanate from Hong Kong in its heyday and is the kind of gross-out, mind-blowing cinema we may never see from them again.

The Shaws' final stab at spectacular gross-out horror came at year's end with Yang Chuan's *Seeding of a Ghost* (1983), a film that garnered something of a cult following with international fans (largely) due to its relative obscurity and unavailability for years. Released on VHS and laserdisc by Ocean Shores, it slipped out of circulation for nearly two decades before Celestial granted it a digital release through distributor Intercontinental in October 2007. Taxi-driver Zhou (Phillip Ko) accidentally knocks down a pedestrian one evening, who turns out to be a sorcerer who places a curse of misfortune on him. Soon, his wife (Maria Yuen) is cheating on him with a gambler at her casino and, through a mistimed series of events, eventually ends up raped and murdered. Zhou decides to track down the sorcerer and call on his own supernatural justice against those who killed his wife with the expected diabolical consequences.

Whilst *Seeding of a Ghost* is more of the same in the vein of *Bewitched* and *The Boxer's Omen*, Yang Chuan was no Kuei Chih Hung and the film ultimately suffers in the long run due to the pedestrian direction it shares with Yang's previous *Hell Has No Boundary*. Assuredly, there are sequences littered throughout of inspired lunacy that went a long way towards *Seeding* gaining the cult following it has (such as the titular "seeding" sequence and a variety of gory set pieces that culminate in the climax's descent into icky monster movie territory), but to get there the viewer has to cut through a lot of chaff. Inevitably, that means wading through a first half of dull, listless characterizations and endless scenes of gratuitous nudity and soft-core sex that only serve to grind the film to a halt rather than give it much needed momentum. As a result, Yang's film ends up more a curio of the tail end cycle of the Shaw studios than a bona fide cult classic. It may wear its exploitation heart on its sleeve with pride, but it's really middle-of-the-road entertainment at best, enlivened by some explosive moments of horror (as well as way too much sex) that would otherwise have been consigned to the graveyard of forgotten horrors had it not been for those moments alone.

Continuing the downward slide, prior to closing the doors on their feature film production facility, one last ghostly-horror slipped out of the gates before economics overcame history. Angela's Mak's *The Siamese Twins* (1984), closely modelled on Brian De Palma's *Sisters* (1973), ended the studios horror productions with a whimper rather than the expected bang. Plucked from television stock, Mak's film feels exactly like it was born of that idiom, modestly following Kei (Idy Chan) home from Canada to find her mother (Tanny Tien Ni) a nervous wreck. Plagued by visions of a ghostly child (with white ball ala Fellini's "Toby Dammit" episode of *Spirits of the Dead*, 1968), it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out where the plot is headed, given the film's title and Mak's seeming apparent desire to generate mystery as to her denouement in the opening act, but ultimately *The Siamese Twins* is a positively anemic end to an era.

Other smaller studios had popped up in the interim, and Golden Harvest (run by former Shaw executives Raymond Chow and Leonard Ho) had snatched market share out from under the Shaws. With competitors proving they could produce horror titles equal or superior to the former major studio, such as *Devil Fetus* (1983) (Lo Wei Motion Pictures), *Possessed I & II* (1983/84) (Johnny Mak Productions), *The Black Magic with Buddha* (1983) (Law Cheung Company), *Centipede Horror* (1982) (Winson Entertainment) and cult favourite *The Rape After* (1984) (Europa Film Enterprises), there was really little to do. And so, against the young Turks and major players who had forced their hand, Shaw Brothers Studios closed shop on theatrical feature production, shifting their attentions to the booming television market and their television subsidiary TVB (which Sir Run Run had taken control of as chairman in the eighties, having originally launched the station in 1973).



THE BOXER'S OMEN

## New Horizons: Cosmopolitan Films and the Future

The late eighties saw a brief return to feature film production for Shaw Brothers Studios. In a joint venture between themselves and their television arm TVB, they formed *Cosmopolitan Films*, operated under the auspices of Mona Fong, who had been producer on the lion's share of Shaw theatrical features at the beginning of the decade through to the original studios closure. In addition, a handful of titles were produced under the Shaw Brothers banner in tandem with the new production facility.

First film out of the gate under the Cosmopolitan headliner was Wong Jing's *Mr. Possessed* (1988), surprisingly a horror-comedy! Much more straight romantic comedy than an out and out horror production, the story

plumped up bachelor Li Zhi (Kenny Bee) who is beset by a familial curse that prevents him from getting close to a woman, lest disaster and misfortune befall his poor suitor. Into the picture pops Xiao Yu (Carol Cheng), who takes an interest in him regardless of his strange claims, and soon she's not only feuding with his domineering mother but also the generational phantom that reigns over him.

A lot of fun and very light (as well as bereft of director Wong's later excursions into more directly crude, sexually based humor), like all Hong Kong horror-comedies of the eighties, it unexpectedly shifts gears into a more serious tone come the finale where Xiao Yu and Li's family fight the demonic spirit to the death for Li's soul. In many ways, the film mirrors the Shaws' earlier *A Friend from Inner Space* (1984), where the ghost motif was used as the catalyst to rekindle a relationship, in that a young boy befriends a mischievous spirit (Shek Kin) and harnesses his supernatural energies to bring his separated parents (Ti Lung and Josephine Siao) back together. Similarly, that one wrapped up with effects-laden conflict between warring entities.

Capitalizing on the newfound success of former children's television presenter and TVB drama actor Stephen Chow, the Shaws locked him in for a series of productions that commenced with *Look Out, Officer!* (1990). 1990 was Chow's boom year, as he successfully made the transition from a supporting actor in dramatic roles to leading actor in comedies, which was where his true talent lay. Eventually going on to become Hong Kong's foremost comedic actor and, with the self-directed *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) breaking out internationally on release, he was the Shaws' most successful export, originating from the comedy arena. There is a glimmer of Chow's future talent and successes in *Look Out, Officer!*, where he essayed police officer Sing who is haunted by the ghost of a senior detective (Bill Tung, 1933-2006) killed in the line of duty. Being a Stephen Chow vehicle, the trade-off for Sing to investigate Uncle Cheung's murder is that his ghostly partner helps him win the heart of the lyrical object of his affections, Ah Yuk (Vivian Chan).

For a title pretty much consigned to the vaults of catalogue obscurity, *Look Out, Officer!* is exactly the kind of genre-hybrid mash-up that won the hearts of many a global Hong Kong cinema junkie in the early nineties. Part comedy, part romance, part crime thriller part horror film and all entertainment with a capital E, Liu Shih Yu's ghost-comedy-cop genre-blender powers along at tripwire



SEEDING OF A GHOST

pace, wrapping up with the kind of hyper-stylized gun-fighting action Hong Kong movie fans adored, and plays that aesthetic off a climactic duel with the villain's black magic sorcerer. It even features a cameo by silicone-enhanced sex bomb Amy Yip, later of *Robotrix* (1991) and *Sex and Zen* (1991) notoriety. Too much to love!



Shaws' final horror-comedy under the Cosmopolitan wing was Jeff Lau's (rather underwhelming) Stephen Chow vehicle *Out of the Dark* (1995). Having worked with future super director Johnnie To on his earlier efforts *Justice, My Foot* (1992) and *The Mad Monk* (1993), Chow found his fortunes with other studios in the interim and pairings with genius comic director Lee Lik Chi, whereas To vocally sounded off that his leading man had proven so difficult to work with that he refused to be involved in another Chow project ever again. Seeing out his Shaw contract, Chow returned as mentally unbalanced ghost-buster Leon (in reference and look to Luc Besson's internationally acclaimed thriller of the same name), who tasks himself with the exercise of exorcising an apartment block haunted by the spirit of a malicious old lady.

Easily one of the least of Chow's theatrical features, *Out of the Dark* has its moments, but they are few and far between, and the comedy under Lau's direction seems forced as well as falls flat on its face more often than not. There's some effective ghostly action along the way, as well as some fairly gory chainsaw action to boot, but one would be hard pressed to acknowledge that Chow hadn't been involved in better work than this mediocre enterprise. Pop princess Karen Mok makes one of her earliest appearances herein (sporting a variety of wigs to hide her shaved head that was a trademark of her early pop career) as Chow's love interest, and veteran Shaw martial arts star Bryan Leung (formerly Liang Jia Ren, or Leung Kar Yan) whisks through in a cameo. Pretty shoddy overall, and quite removed thematically from the bulk of Chow's more comical escapades.

Thereafter, Cosmopolitan would produce two fine Johnnie To helmed dramas, *Loving You* (1995) and *Lifeline* (1997), and under the Shaw Brothers logo pump out a surprisingly effective martial arts, gun-fighting extravaganza update of their own *The Boxer from Shantung* (1972) in *Hero* (1997), headlining Taiwanese-Japanese pop superstar Takeshi Kaneshiro in the Chen Kuan Tai role. Post 1997 perhaps due to the handover of Hong Kong to China from its former British rulers and the uncertainty that it brought with respect to the future of the entertainment industry of the region, all fell quiet again on the Shaw cinema-front. Cosmopolitan closed shop, TVB became one of the foremost free-to-air broadcasters in Hong Kong, and come the new millennium, work began in earnest on the development and construction of a new state-of-the-art studio complex at a cost of US\$180 million, covering over a million square feet in the new premises located at Tseung Kwan O, Hong Kong. Fully operational in 2007 the latter part of the last decade saw a landmark announcement: Shaw Brothers Studios would gradually move back into feature film production, limiting their output to a handful of productions per year in the short-term, but back in business nonetheless.

As of this writing there have only been two films released thus far from the revitalized studios. *Turning Point* (2009) is a feature film spin-off from the popular TVB series "Emergency Unit" that was well received due to the popularity of the series as well as the cult following of the lead character, Michael Tse's "Laughing Gor" (literally, "Laughing Brother"). *72 Tenants of Prosperity* (2010) is a remake of the classic Shaw comedy *The House of 72 Tenants* (1973). Although it sported a "who's who" cast of Hong Kong's current finest, and was the Shaws' offering in the lucrative Chinese New Year box office stakes, *72 Tenants* was met with a lukewarm reception by critics and audiences alike.

History has proven that one box office bomb alone can't completely kill a studio (unless that studio was already well over-committed financially when they turned out a flop, ala Carolco and *Cutthroat Island*) and those at the top at Shaw Brothers are more than market savvy to have their bases covered before their product is in the public arena. What the future holds is anyone's guess at this juncture, two new feature films and a media empire behind them indicates that the new Shaws aren't going anywhere soon. They may not return to the lofty heights of their heyday, but an educated guess would predict that we'll be seeing the Shaw Brothers logo at the head of a variety of Hong Kong movies for some time to come. As to whether or not we'll see more horror productions in the same vein as many of the gems they produced? Only time will tell but one certainly hopes so.

*Editor's note: Due to space constraints in Scream #21, the following footnotes have been included in this issue. Refer to issue #21 for part 1 of this article.*

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>4</sup> *Hell*, or *Diyu*, in Chinese mythology is far from the blood and thunder eternal torment of Christian belief (unless, of course, you have been a sinner during your life, then it is likely you might be subjected to the Eighteen Levels of Hell before you repent and can reincarnate). Most commonly believed to consist of Eighteen Levels, "Hell" is the realm of the dead, an underworld where the dead seek penance for the sins of their life. It is normally represented as a multi-layer multi-chamber maze-like construct, where the soul must make its journey and undergo judgment through each level before reincarnation. Interpretations of the afterlife vary between Buddhist and Taoist beliefs, but the elementary concepts are essentially quite similar

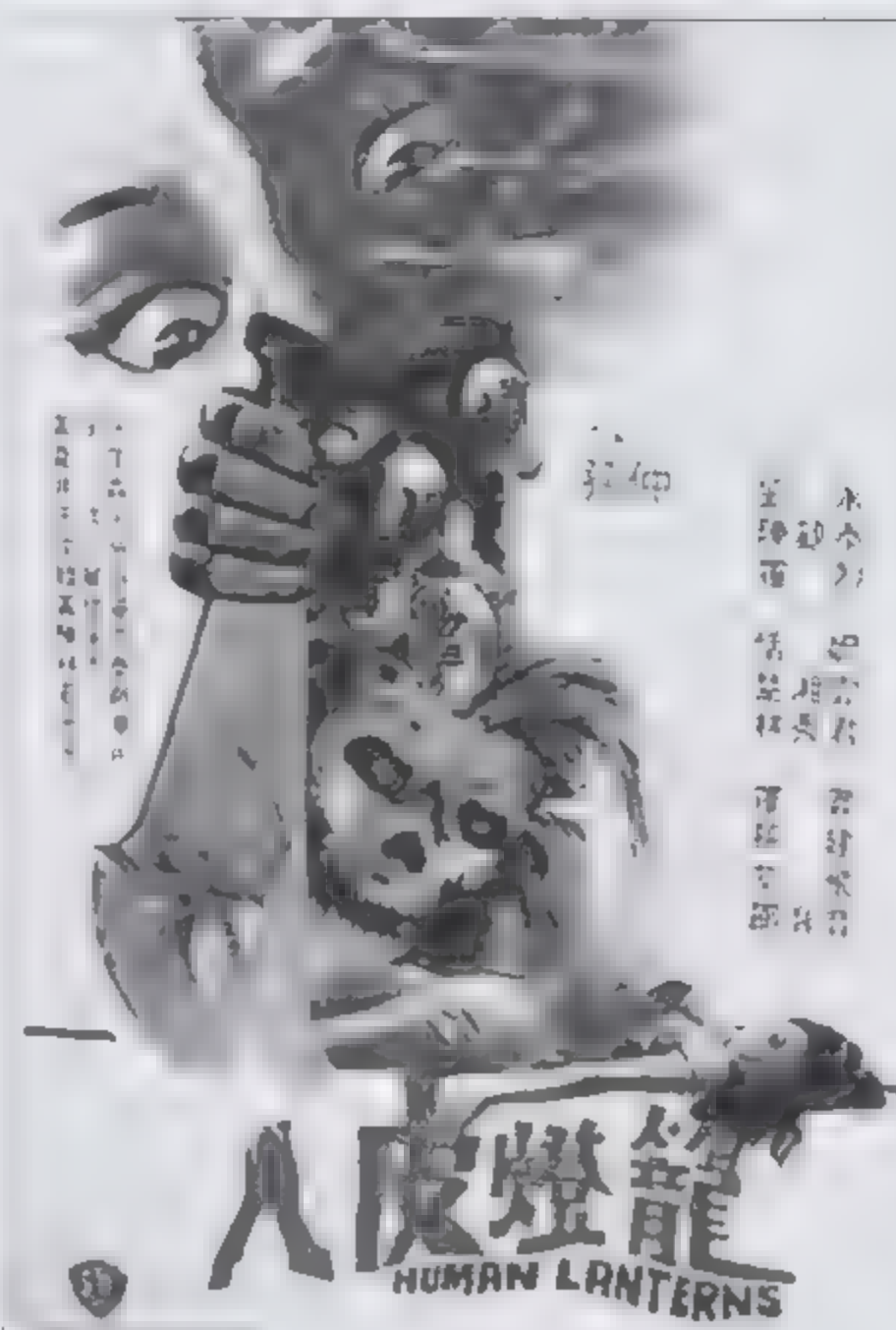
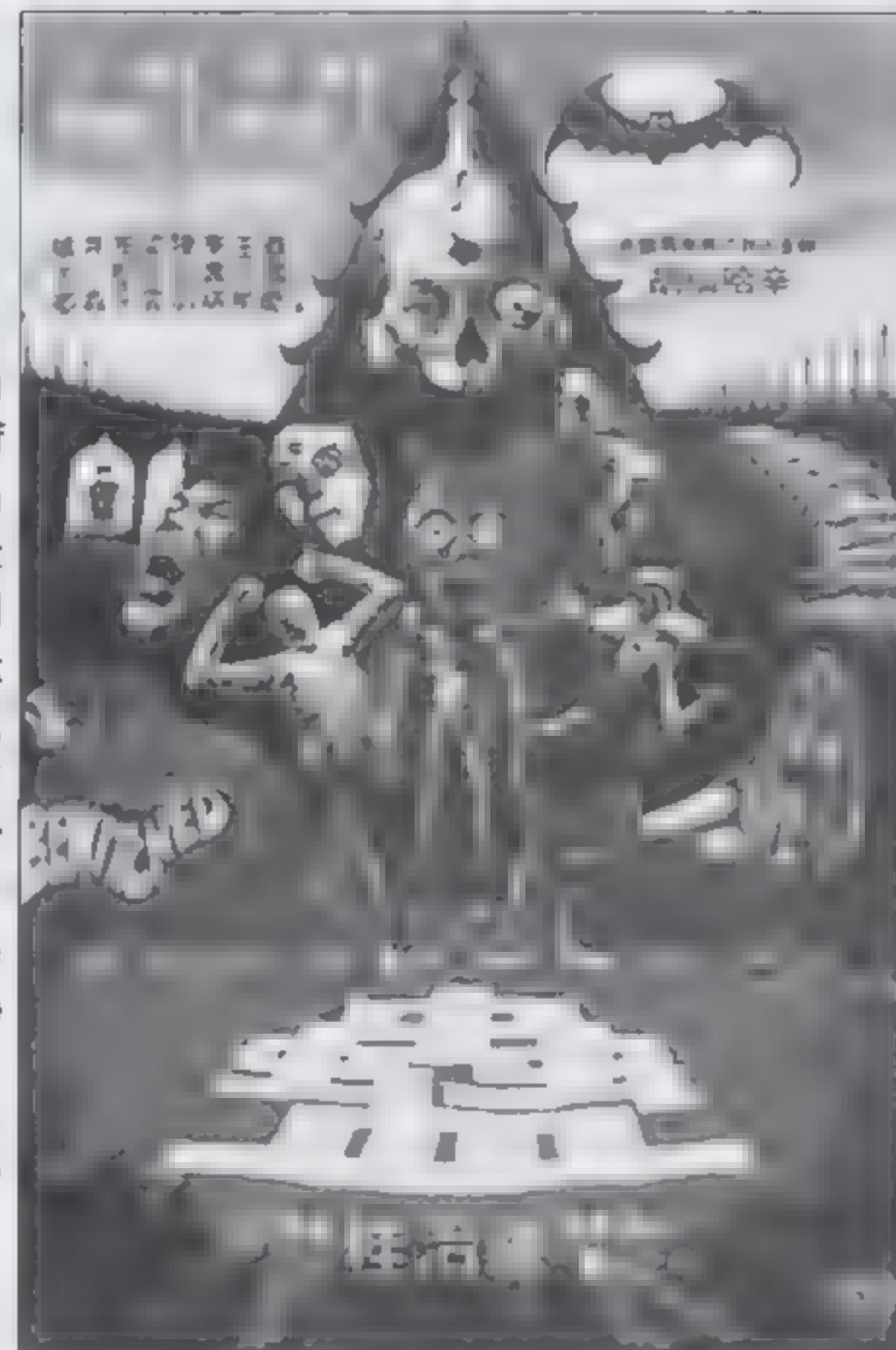
<sup>5</sup> *Twins* proved a hugely successful phenomenon

upon their debut on the Hong Kong entertainment circuit and it was only natural that, like countless pop-stars before them, they would break into the movie industry. Whilst the more lively of the duo, Charlene Choi, has managed to retain her image and maintain consistent movie work as an offset against her singing career partner Gillian Chung found her career almost in complete tatters when pornographic photos of her and former boyfriend Edison Chen found their way anonymously to the Internet in 2008. Being largely a conservative industry, such material is more likely to cause great harm or ruin the career of an actor or singer in Hong Kong as opposed to the increased awareness that such an event would generate in more liberal Western countries. As an indicator of the difference in cultures, another of the singer/actresses involved in the photo scandal, Bobo Chan, saw her career instantly destroyed in the fallout from the incident in the weeks immediately following the publication of the photos on the Internet.

<sup>6</sup> With the broadening of permissiveness in the region's censorship climate of the seventies, which would open even further by the end of the decade, the Shaw films went one further than their previous coy hints of nudity in earlier films and exposed far more female flesh in their exploitation titles (though the watershed for full-frontal female nudity wouldn't be broken until 1977) with the liberal use of body doubles for some of their bigger female stars. Where many fans of the studios swear blind that actress of the calibre of Lily Li, Hu Chin, and even kung fu starlet Shu Pei Pei had "bared all" for the cameras, retrospective viewing of many of these titles proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that body doubles were used extensively where A-listers weren't willing to expose themselves for their audiences (indeed, sometimes multiple doubles were used during a shoot as the physiques of those uncovered would differ from scene to scene). However although doubles were extensively used by the studios, there was an ample

bevy of B-actresses that were willing to undress for the cameras and in turn drew both fame and notoriety as the Shaws' stable of sex bombs.

<sup>7</sup> Against his more revered and critically acclaimed historical dramas and musicals, Taiwanese director Li Han Hsiang also made something of a name for himself as a pioneer in the soft-core adult industry with a series of long-form and anthology-based features, the earliest of which was *Legends of Lust* (1973). Often drawn from bawdy Chinese folktales, the productions were popular with local audiences as well as indicative of the relaxation of local censorship that started to occur. In 1974, freeing of censorship meant that Li could film a big screen adaptation of the classic Chinese novel *Jin Ping Mei*, a work long considered pornographic but reassessed as a classic at the advent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, turning out *The Golden Lotus*. The novel has spawned numerous cinematic adaptations, the most recent of which were *The Forbidden Legend: Sex and Chopsticks I & II*, although Li himself tackled a number of variations on the tale for the screen throughout his career





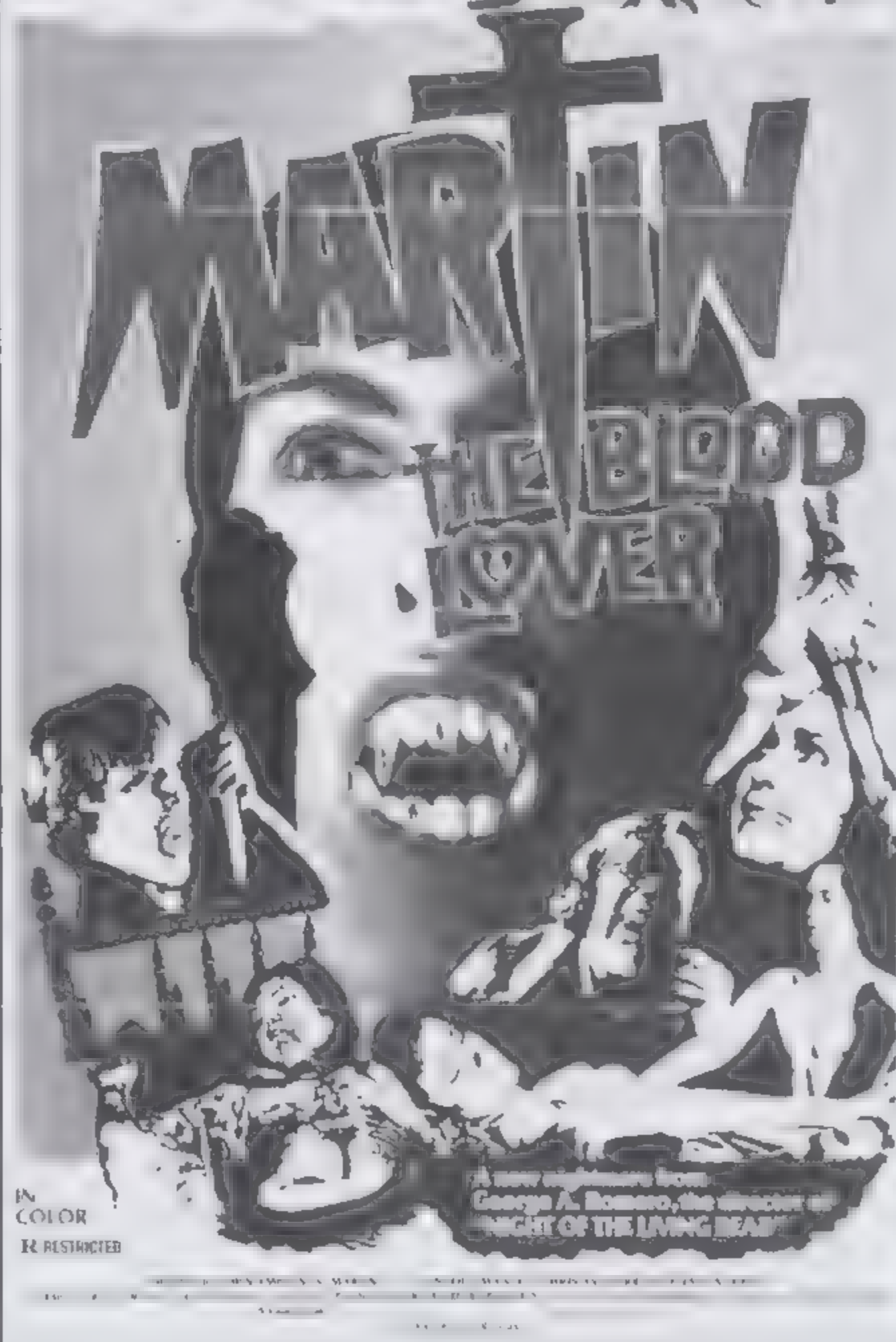
# HUMAN MONSTERS

LOOKING BACK AT  
GEORGE ROMERO'S

## MARTIN

ARTICLE BY HEATHER DRAIN

He could be the boy next door...



Some people believe that monsters are born, not made—that there are those who are literally “bad seeds” that grow up to be rapists, dictators, or murderers. Of course, if life was that black and white, then there would be no need for the horror genre. The reasons we’re attracted to horror are multi-faceted, but the basic reason is that it is a safe way for us to explore our fears and the darker side of human nature. When it comes down to it, monsters are most certainly made, not born. Mary Shelley knew that when she wrote *Frankenstein*, and George Romero knew that when he made his underrated masterpiece, *Martin* (1977).

The film centers around a young man named Martin (John Amplas), whose boyish appearance may or may not mask an age-old vampire. Whether or not his vampirism is supernatural or an aspect of a deeper pathology is really not the main point, though it is one I will get to here in a bit. The real disease is the familial sins that Martin is ultimately the martyr for, along with all of his victims. While it is a vastly different film, *Martin*’s theme of the innocent paying for family dysfunction brings to mind Walerian Borowczyk’s *La Bete* (1975), where the main family’s son literally dies from his ancestor’s cursed deeds. The innocent always pays for the sins of the guilty.

Horror cinema up to that point had not seen anything quite like *Martin*. The closest heir would have to be Hitchcock’s groundbreaking film, *Psycho* (1960). Both feature boyish leads who are powerless to their darker urges, often fueled by psychosexual impulses and unhealthy rearing. Norman Bates kills due to his potentially incestuous upbringing from his mother, and Martin kills because he was raised to think he carries the family “curse” of vampirism. Norman and Martin are two characters who are captivating and at times, even sympathetic, putting the audience in the uncomfortable position of having to identify with killers.

Both films feature emotionally impacting musical scores. The Bernard Herrmann soundtrack for *Psycho* is now legendary, but the Donald Rubinstein score for *Martin* is just as good. The sign of a perfect film score is when you cannot envision the film without it, and this is most definitely the case with these two films.

*Martin* was even supposed to be entirely in black and white in its original three-hour form. (Sadly that print is lost.) Certainly, neither film would be half as powerful without possessing actors as innately talented and physically striking as Anthony Perkins and John Amplas.

But what *Psycho* hinted at, *Martin* bravely delves right in and simmers. Vampire or no, Martin is our protagonist and is an amazingly complex, sympathetic, and ultimately sad character. We’re never really told about his parentage, but he ends up with his batty and uber-cantankerous uncle, Tata Cuda, played to the hilt by the memorable Lincoln Maazel. Cuda immediately accuses Martin of being a “nosferatu” and reacts extremely hostile to him, to the extent of rigging up a crude alarm on Martin’s bedroom door to keep tabs on his comings and goings. He even hires a priest to perform an old school Catholic exorcism on the boy, which hits too close to home for anyone who has grown up with religious fundamentalism.

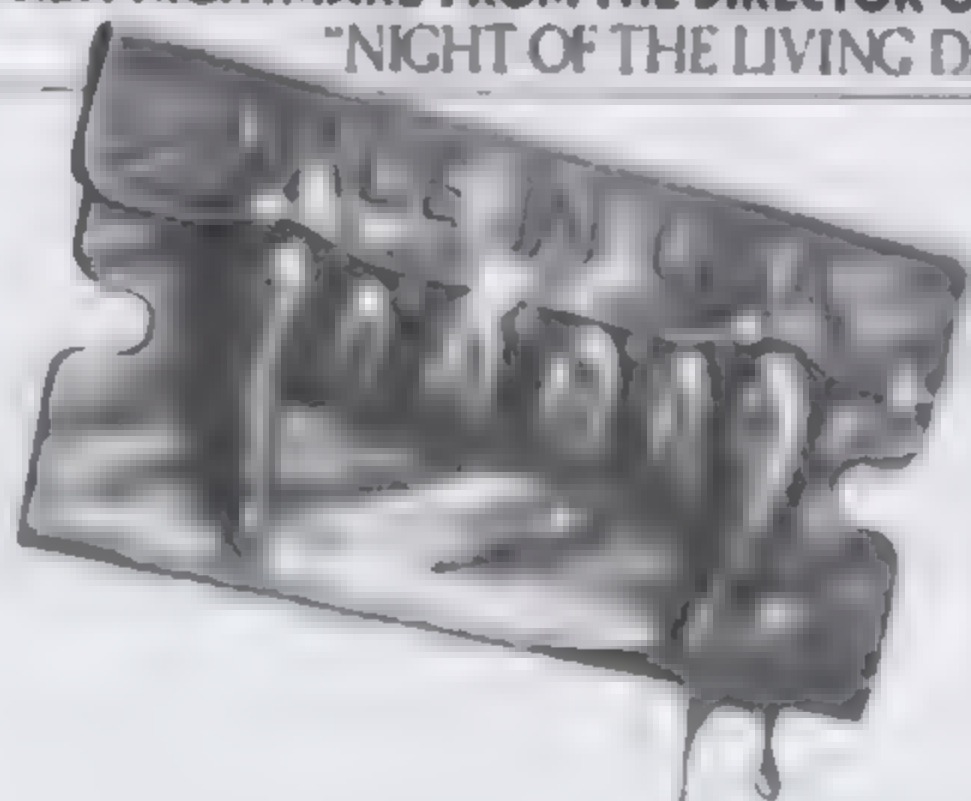
Part of Romero’s genius is how he approaches Martin’s “vampirism.” While there has been a debate for years over whether or not Martin is a true supernatural vampire or a victim of mental illness, most of the signs point to the latter. Romero himself said as much in the featurette on the Lion’s Gate DVD, “Making Martin: A Recounting.” A good chunk of the confusion is fueled by the black-and-white flashbacks/visions that Martin has, especially when stalking his victims. If anything, these scenes serve a dual purpose.

The first purpose is to put us into the headspace of Martin and how he is romanticizing his life and his deeds. He is never shown to be truly cruel and is often surprisingly gentle with his prey (well, as gentle as one can be while murdering and drinking blood). The real world is ugly and full of people who are often rude and ignorant, and being placed in the industrial and rotting landscape of urban Pennsylvania doesn’t help matters. One could say that he is flashing back to his past life. But more than likely, it’s a coping mechanism for the intense unhappiness in his life. Even when religious folks and angry villagers are terrorizing him, it all plays out like a classic, 1930’s horror film.

All of this ties into the second purpose of the flashbacks. They are a brilliant device to play on what we, the viewers, are expecting with a “vampire” film, all the while giving us the hard reality that the closest, proven thing we have to the creatures of the night have more in common with someone like Ted Bundy than they do with Dr. Alucard. After all, vampires are the mythical world’s serial killers.



A NEW NIGHTMARE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF  
"NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD."



See it  
with someone  
you're sure of...

George A. Romero's

# MARTIN

Introducing JOHN AMPLAS as "MARTIN"

starring LINCOLN MAZEL · CHRISTINE FORREST · ELAYNE MADEAU  
SARAH VENABLE · TOM SAVINA · HAN MIDDLETON · AL LEVITSKY

Produced by RICHARD RUBINSTEIN

Original score: DONALD RUBINSTEIN

Photography by MICHAEL GORNICK

• DOLBY DIGITAL •  
IN COLOUR



- 1) Martin was trendy before any Hot Topic locations popped up.
- 2) Blood, bath and beyond!

Heavily dysfunctional families usually have patterns of unhealthy behavior that can cycle back a couple of generations. So it's no surprise that a lot of real life killers had extremely unhealthy upbringings. Martin was brought up with the notion that he was this bloodthirsty supernatural killer while never being treated like an actual human being. On the flipside, his cousin Christina (Christine Forrest), one of the very few people who are actually kind to Martin, grew up in the same family and turned out healthy, which is very true to life. Plenty of us grow up with dysfunction and yet manage to turn out to be fine. But, if someone is especially sensitive, naturally prone to mental instability, and abused enough, you'll get your vampire. Just don't necessarily expect him or her to be some romantic, poet shirt-wearing hipster

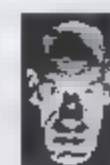
Two of the things that make Martin such a frightening killer are the intelligence and agility he displays while going after his victims. There is nothing scarier than a smart killer, and he is definitely no exception. Alternately, it does make his situation all the more sad, because if he had been nurtured by a sane family, who knows what potential may have been reached.

Finding any horror film, past or present, that is intelligent enough to incorporate the shades of gray instead of the typical black/white moral pantheon, can be a rare thing. But this film would not be half as powerful without the lynchpin performance of John Amplas. He is to this film what Kinski was to *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972). Romero could not have found a more perfect actor than Amplas, who is able to convey a myriad of emotions with his face alone.

Physically, he is Martin. At times he looks amazingly boyish, complete with awkward gait and downcast eyes. Yet he is able to simultaneously project a world-weariness that lends itself well to someone who either thinks he is a vampire or actually is a vampire. His combination of striking looks and subtle emoting results in making Martin one of the best roles in film. In a just world, guys like Amplas, Romero, Rubinstein, and Tom Savini, who did the effects along with playing Christina's mook boyfriend, would be winning Oscars left and right.

It should also be noted that this is a good-looking film, courtesy of cinematographer Michael Gornick. The framing, the choice of camera angles, all of it is tight and plays up everything that needs to be. Tension is created during the stalk and kill scenes, though some of the most haunting scenes are the ones of Martin walking around the city at night. The sense of loneliness is damn near tangible, making the movie all the more effective and powerful.

*Martin* is one of the greatest horror films ever made—not because of the blood, but because it shows the damage that can be done when one's family, biology, and mental state fails them. This movie is a masterpiece of nuance, emotion, and the deep fissures in the human condition.





# Back to the Grind

## Documentary Filmmaker Elijah Drenner on *American Grindhouse*

By Brian Albright

The past several years have been a bonanza for fans of documentaries on horror and exploitation films, with the *vérité* flicks like *Nightmares in Red, White and Blue*, *Autopsy of the Dead*, *Midnight Madness*, and *42nd Street Memories* either in production or already released, and more on the way. One of the most anticipated has been Elijah Drenner's *American Grindhouse*, which is currently in release theatrically, and will finally arrive on DVD later this year.

An Iowa native, 32-year-old Drenner is probably best known for his work directing and producing DVD bonus features for everything from *The Forbidden Kingdom* to *Linda Lovelace for President* through his company, END Films. Ironically, it was this years-in-the-works documentary project that landed him his first DVD gig—Drenner originally started out to make a documentary about cult director Jack Hill, and that connection led him to produce the bonus features for Dark Sky Films' 2007 *Spider Baby* DVD.

Although the Hill documentary didn't go anywhere, Drenner began compiling interviews with other directors and actors, ultimately deciding to turn the project into a condensed history of exploitation films. The final product is a briskly paced history of so-called "grindhouse" filmmaking, from its beginnings with *Traffic in Souls* in 1913 right through the 1970s, and with a nod to modern homages like Quentin Tarantino's *Grindhouse* (2007) and Larry Bishop's *Hell Ride* (2008) tossed in for good measure.

Narrated by Robert Forster, the film includes interviews with such luminaries as H.G. Lewis, Larry Cohen, Fred "The Hammer" Williamson, screenwriter James Gordon White (*The Incredible Two-Headed Transplant*), Lewis Teague (*Alligator*), Fred Olen Ray, Ted V. Mikels, John Landis, Joe Dante, Jack Hill, Bill Lustig, David Hess, Don Edmonds, and many others. The interviews are interspersed with clips from dozens of genre films, both well known and obscure (this is, in fact, the only documentary you'll find that features extensive clips from the crazy 1971 Nazis-versus-Jesus film *The Tormentors*).

While the interviews and clips are great, the film is really a showcase for the editing skills Drenner has developed over years of compiling DVD extras: the transitions are fun and colorful; he doesn't linger too long on any one subject; the interview clips are concise; and, the talking-head historians included here to provide context (Kim Morgan, Eddie Muller, Eric Schaefer) are suitably enthusiastic.

The only drawback—fans of this type of stuff have probably heard a lot of this material before. Thankfully, Drenner has included enough rare clips (outtakes from *Blood Feast*, footage of exploitation pioneer Louis Sonney, etc.) and energetic interviews that this familiar ground doesn't seem so well-trodden. More importantly, the interview subjects also seem to be having fun, with Landis in rare form and David Hess acting, well, very odd.

*American Grindhouse* has been shown at a number of festivals and as of this writing was still playing theatrically in several markets (as well as on cable). Although the DVD screener provided did not include extras, Drenner assures us that it will be packed with bonus interview footage (including several interviews that didn't make it into the final film), a "making of" featurette, dozens of trailers, and tons of posters and behind-the-scenes stills from the films mentioned in the documentary.

Drenner sat down with *Scream* for a brief interview to discuss the evolution of the film, his thoughts on the term "grindhouse," and his upcoming DVD projects with END Films.

**Your original idea for this film was very different than the end product, correct?**

The same summer I met Jack Hill, I met Ted V. Mikels, and he was very interesting to me. It just seemed like an interesting idea to make a film about all of these filmmakers who existed for a very specific moment in time, and when the industry changed, their careers changed with it.

But the first cut of that movie was not very thrilling. That's when we changed it into a history of exploitation, and how these guys fit into that history.

**Were there any people you tried to get an interview with that didn't pan out?**

There were a lot of people that just flat out said no. I called Harry Novak and he just hung up the phone. John Amero said no. Pam Grier said no. But the majority of the people we contacted said yes.

**Were there interviews that didn't make it into the film?**

We have a Ray Dennis Steckler interview on the DVD. He ran a video store, so we were shooting the interview while he was helping customers. Every ten minutes the phone would ring or customers would come in, and we just kind of went with it. The night we were doing his interview he was shooting footage for the *Incredibly Strange Creatures* sequel, so we went to the venue where he was shooting and we let him use some of our footage, although I've never seen it so I don't know if he ended up using it.

He just didn't fit. He was too much of a rebel to plop into a linear story like that, because he's so nonlinear. His movies are great, but they did not follow the success of anything else.

We also had an interview with Joe Ellison, who made *Don't Go in the House* (1980). We had an interview set up with David Friedman, but he wasn't feeling well at the time and the interview never happened. So we had all this great footage of him at the New Beverly theater [in Los Angeles], which was meant to be B-roll that turned into A-roll. But we did discover an interview with him and H.G. Lewis from 1987 that ran about an hour, and I condensed that down to about 20 minutes. Those interviews will exist on the DVD as extras.

**One interview that is in the film is the one you did with screenwriter James Gordon White. Although he made a lot of movies, he's not a very well known figure, even among exploitation film fans. Why did you want him in the film?**

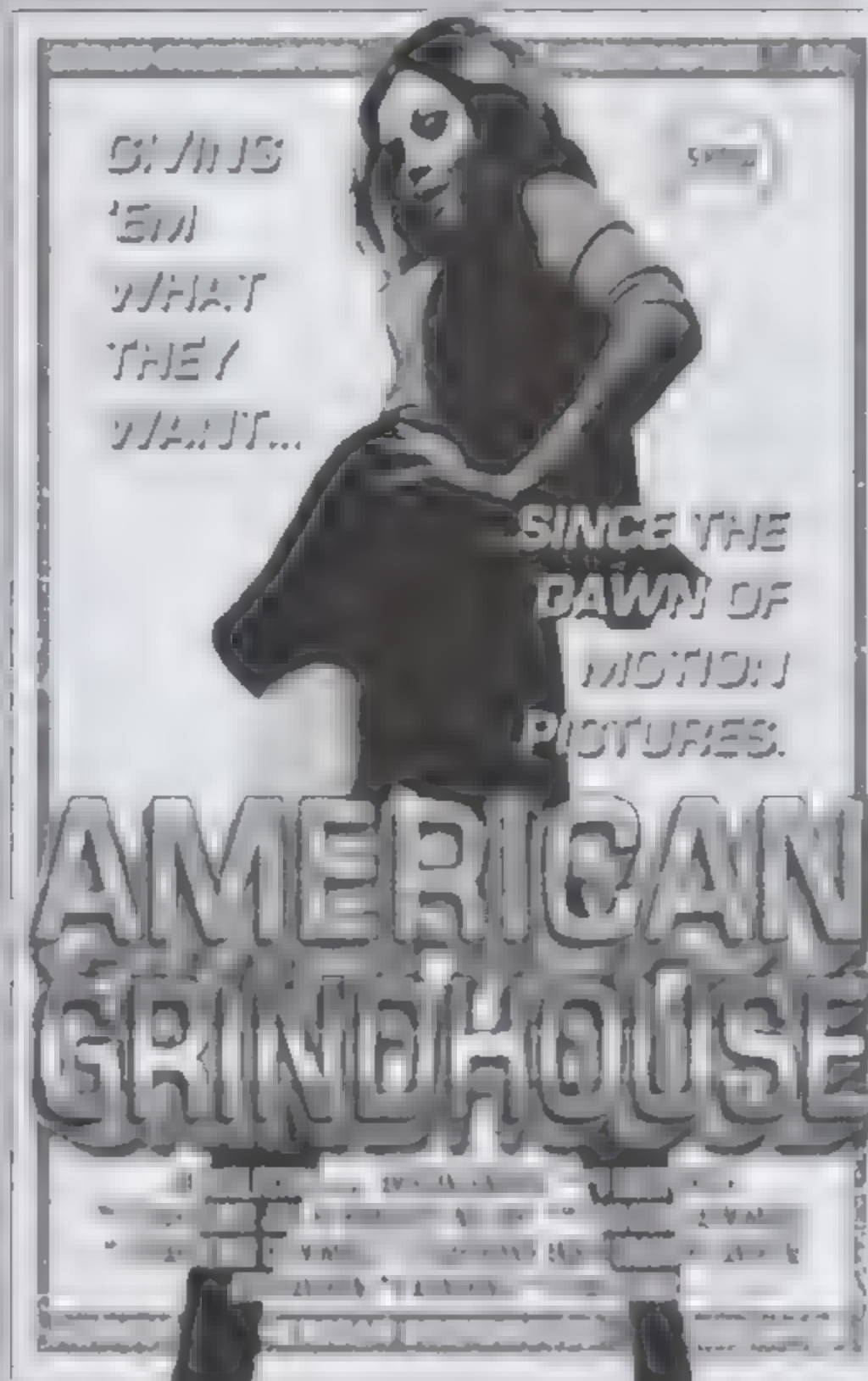
I think—and you can probably relate to this as well—when you start off in an endeavor and you have this idea, sometimes just getting to that person is your goal. I'd already gotten to Roger Corman. That goal was met. So sometimes it's just about getting to the person. It's very selfish, but that's just how it goes. I just wanted to reach out to James White and see what he was like. He wrote most of the biker films for AIP. That's interesting. He's got to have something to say! Someone else may not care about it, so let's go out and find him. I discovered he was friends with Ted Mikels, so we bought him a Greyhound bus ticket—because he wanted to ride the bus—to come out to Las Vegas and spend time with me and Ted. We just spent an entire weekend with Ted and Jim, and it was fun. It was a mini-adventure.

He took his interview very seriously, maybe more seriously than the tone of our documentary, but I still think he comes across very honestly. That whole segment about the schlocky 70s is there for Jim and Ted, because I didn't want to lose their interviews.

I did want to say something, and I don't know if it really comes across, but I think people talk about 70s horror films and how brutal they were and how they reflected anti-Vietnam and anti-Nixon sentiments, but I think for every one *Last House on the Left* (1972), there were a dozen *Incredible Two-Headed Transplants* (1971). People still wanted to see these schlocky, campy horror movies. I think people forget that. It wasn't just nihilism and anti-political horror films. There were still schlocky, silly popcorn movies. And there were more of those, frankly.

**I think you're right. Because those more violent films loom so large in the history of the genre now, people tend to overstate just how grim and serious and violent horror was in the 70s, and attribute all sorts of socio-economic motivations and influences that weren't always there.**

I wanted to say that. I don't know if it comes across. Maybe that message gets lost and it goes a little too quickly, but I wanted to say that, sure, those movies in the 70s were kind of violent and were reflective of society, but there were more of those schlocky movies. Maybe they weren't as good and weren't as influential, but there was a much larger marketplace for those movies than the ones that are ironically now better remembered.





The history of exploitation movies is a big, sprawling topic. What was your approach to tackling that kind of subject matter in a fairly short documentary format?

A lot of editing. The original cut wasn't four hours long or anything; it was never intended to be longer than 90 minutes. It was just finding the best sound bites from people and trying to create a linear story out of something that was very nonlinear. That was really tough.

I think there's a lot of criticism I've put on myself, as well as a lot of criticism from people who went into the movie wanting a little bit more, that we *didn't* go a lot of places. I was okay with that, because it's really not fun for me as a viewer or as someone who makes this material professionally for DVDs, to tell you everything. To just explain it all, beat it to death, hit you over the head. There should still be a bit of a mystery, I think. And it should inspire people. If you're a fan and it gets a conversation going, that's what I wanted. It wasn't laziness. It wasn't that I didn't know. I purposefully wanted to leave some people out, and when the movie was over with, to put the ball in the viewer's court to take the next step.

I also wanted to make it as accessible as possible to everyone, while not skimping on gratuitous footage. That was hard. Will my mom watch this? Will the gorehounds watch this? I think it's a little bit of both. To walk that line was a challenge. I don't know if we achieved it, but it was still fun. To make it as accessible as possible was the biggest challenge, and it needed to be around 80 minutes. I really thought it should be like a glorified DVD extra.

The film was underway when the Quentin Tarantino/Robert Rodriguez *Grindhouse* film came out. In previous interviews, and in the documentary itself, it seemed like a struggle to pin down the term "grindhouse" as it's used today. It used to mean something very different.

That's been sort of tough to explain to people. There's no way to explain it. We were trying to compare it to film noir, as a genre classification. We were asking people like Herschell Gordon Lewis and Fred Williamson and Jack Hill about grindhouse, and they were saying, "I don't know what you're talking about."

Fred was like, "My movies did not look scratched up. There were no scenes missing. My movies looked good. / looked good."

But it's like film noir where people like Fritz Lang didn't think they were making film noir at the time; they were just making movies

**It was really more of a distributor/theater owner term, right?**

It was like carny lingo. It evolved into something much greater, maybe incorrectly, I think. But it's turned into a buzzword that has encapsulated a lot of different genres. I don't think grindhouse is a genre. I don't think exploitation is a genre. It's a classification in which a lot of different genres fit. You grew up in the Midwest, too, right? So for us, these movies were drive-in movies. Is drive-in grindhouse? Well, it's kind of the same thing, but it isn't.

Grindhouse was a burlesque house, and then once the market changed, they turned those grindhouse live venues into theater houses. That's what it is. It means bump and grind. It just turned into something different.

You can't stop culture. It just happens. It's a really vague topic, and to do a documentary on something that's vague is frustrating, but ultimately very freeing as well because you can say to hell with everything and do whatever you want.

**When is the DVD actually coming out?**

It was going to come out sooner than later but the distributor keeps getting theatrical bookings for it so they're in no rush to put out the DVD.

Never in my wildest imaginations did I think we would be playing theatrical venues. It has a life, and it's not something I was aware would happen when we were making it. I guess I'd rather be pleasantly surprised than humbly disappointed.

The only world we knew was DVD extras. I just thought it was going to be a DVD. I made it in a way so that as soon as it was over you want to watch all the extras. Just keep it at this high-octane level, and as soon as the end credits roll, you grab the remote control, hit menu and go to all the extras. That's how I made it, so the fact it's playing theatrically is a surprise.

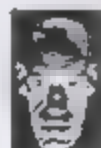
But you make something so people will see it. What good is a movie if people can't watch it?

**What's next for you?**

We keep doing lots of DVD extras. We're doing *Take a Hard Ride* (1975) and *Too Hot to Handle* (1976) for Shout! Factory. We're doing the "Women in Cages" collection for Shout. We're doing *The Baby* (1973) and *Bloody Birthday* (1981) for Severin. We're doing stuff for Dark Sky.

We're lucky enough that people like Shout or Dark Sky or Severin still do these old movies, because there is not a lot of demand for an old movie on HD. That market has changed. There is still a market for old movies, but it's not on DVD like it used to be.

There is still a market. The trick is getting those people interested; it's not the average consumer anymore. The average consumer is not picking up these kooky movies. But there are still people out there. You just have to get to them. Thankfully, people like Shout! Factory are still spending money on doing HD transfers. That's the market now. I'm happy and lucky enough to still get to do these things.



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# DVD REVIEWS

## ARGENTO GOES BLU!

### INFERNO

Directed by Dario Argento (1980)  
(1980) Arrow Films UK Blu-Ray



Maybe the best example of the warped fairytale/dream-logic side of Dario Argento's mesmerizing fantastical works, *Inferno*, the 'Second' of the Three Mothers trilogy (begun by *Suspria* and finally completed by *Mother of Tears* in 2007), hits Blu-ray via this UK import. A 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox co-production that saw little distribution in North America, it remains almost as unsung as it did in 1980, a formidable masterpiece from Argento's canon lost in the mammoth shadows of the more successful and similarly-themed *Suspria*. (To be fair, the film does have its rabid devotees—just witness the packed audience of Argento-philes in an extra filmed at the New Beverly Cinema in Los Angeles, where Video Watchdog's Tim Lucas, composer Keith Emerson and star Irene Miracle hold court for an energetic 30m discussion covering all aspects of production. Those who love it, love it a lot.) Rose (Miracle) is a poet living in New York growing increasingly fascinated with an ancient tome that tells of the Three Mothers. After informing her brother, Mark (Leigh McCloskey), via letter in Rome, her sibling unknowingly comes into contact with another of the enigmatic trio (of Tears, here portrayed by Ania Pieroni). Back in New York, Rose scrambles through secret corridors and watery underground crawlspaces to find the dwellings of the so-called *Mater Tenebrarum* (Veronica Lazar). The mystery grows to encompass an elderly architect, Mark's nosey friend Sara (Eleonora Giorgi) who meets her untimely demise along with a neighbor (*Deep Red*'s Gabriele Lavia), and the antiques dealer who sold the book to Rose in the first place. Featuring a plethora of gruesome animal attacks (something of a fixation of Argento's, given the subject matter of the later *Phenomena*), *Inferno*'s even more noteworthy for being the last film-work of Italian maestro Mario Bava—he contributes some of the matte work to fool the viewer into believing Rome is New York, as well as a magnificent skeletal revelation during the film's finale. Keith Emerson, of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, contributes the almost church-like score, adapting Verdi at a higher pitch to suit his own horror-movie purposes. Although Argento's been previously known to dip into extreme candy colors in the photography of his pictures, *Inferno* may take the cake for being the most outré in the lighting department: red, yellow and green gels are prevalent throughout. It's a breathtakingly garish trip into a nightmarish netherworld where story takes a backseat to an overriding atmosphere. Extras on this two-disc set are more comprehensive than those of the 2-disc *Deep Red*, though both Argento's and Daria Nicolodi's are taped from that same interview session. In an entertaining 15m chat, Argento friend and contemporary Luigi Cozzi waxes about his Third Mother stab, *The Black Cat* (1989), also known as *Demons 6*. (Most amusingly, Nicolodi and Argento dismiss Cozzi's claims that Nicolodi scripted and Argento has even seen the film at the end of their own interview segments.) No commentary track is provided, but Mark Kermode's 2002 documentary on Argento, *An Eye for Horror*, along with a previous DVD extra from the Anchor Bay release (Argento and assistant director Lamberto Bava, interviewed separately) are housed on the second disc. A 35m trailer gallery that extends to *Mother of Tears* is another welcome addition. Arrow's seemingly trademark 4-page reversible packaging also allows you to display the cover of your choice.

### DEEP RED [*Profondo Rosso*]

Directed by Dario Argento (1975)  
(1975) Arrow Films UK Blu-Ray



Coming off the poorly received if well-intentioned historical drama *Five Days in Milan* (1973), Dario Argento surely must have found solace in returning to the then-proliferate genre that he helped popularize: the *giallo*. With *Deep Red*, Argento created his first out-and-out masterpiece, thanks in large part to a number of firsts in fruitful collaborations (namely, actress/muse/mother-to-Asia Daria Nicolodi and rock unit Goblin hired to accompany the sleek visuals with their propulsive, thumping score). It's also a showcase for Argento's sly visual stylistics to be put center-stage, impeccably calibrated to craft the inimitable apotheosis of all films to feature black-gloved killers cleverly dispatching (mostly) females. David Hemmings (leading man of earlier high-art counterpart *Blow-Up*) stars as Marcus Daly, a disillusioned jazz pianist who takes it upon himself to investigate a series of murders. Like most of the leads in Argento's so-called 'Animal' trilogy (and *giallos* in large), Marcus plays prime witness to a murder that doubles as a spectacular set-piece. In this case, the death of psychic Helga (Macha Méril) is the instigating event. Marcus can't quite shake his accurate intuition that he knows more about the crime than his psyche is letting on. Pontificating philosophically with fellow musician/pal Carlo (Gabriele Lavia) and playfully sparring on the topic of gender politics with Gianna (Nicolodi), a reporter who publishes his photo, Marcus is drawn further into the complicated web as the body count rises. Tantalizing glimpses of a silhouette slaughtering another may provide the deep-ridden Freudian clues into the Why, but then again, they may just be Argento pulling the wool over our eyes, like so many other loose threads he introduces and then ignores. But, no Matter. As Nicolodi mentions in her 15-minute interview segment located on disc one of the Blu-ray, *Deep Red* works remarkably well as a series of Goblin music videos comprised solely of expertly photographed murders. Injecting a degree of reflexivity into the *giallo* (the opening dialogue consists of Hemmings exclaiming that a particular jam session is "too precise too formal. It should be more trashy"), Argento wrestles with a type of film that, at the time, had been done to death. He succeeds in both imbibing fresh blood while simultaneously raising the bar. Arrow Films's Blu-Ray offers *Deep Red* in both an International and a U.S. version that omits much of the romance between Nicolodi and Hemmings; both cuts are restored and looking pristine in HD (save for the opening credit sequence of the latter). A feature-length audio commentary by Danish filmmaker and Argento expert Thomas Rostock delves into more subtextual matters, while a trio of solo-recorded interviews informs us of behind-the-scenes tales: Argento (15m), Nicolodi (20m) and Goblin member Claudio Simonetti (15m). Disc Two's main extra is a tour of Rome's Profondo Rosso shop, led by Argento associate Luigi Cozzi (20m). International and U.S. trailers, reversible packaging with four different covers and liner notes written by Argento-phile Alan Jones round out this excellent presentation of a key Argento work.

Both reviews by Aaron Graham



## TERMINAL ISLAND

Directed by Stephanie Rothman  
(1973) Code Red DVD

Ask gramps what to do about the criminal population's high recidivism rate, and he's likely to say, "Ship 'em all off to an island! Let them kill each other off, and save us taxpayers' money!" Such is the premise of Stephanie Rothman's *Terminal Island*. The State of California, overburdened with the repeal of the death penalty is now forced to ship its most incorrigible prisoners to the San Bruno Maximum Security Penal Island, where they are forced to either survive living in the jungle—or die at the hands of their fellow inmates.

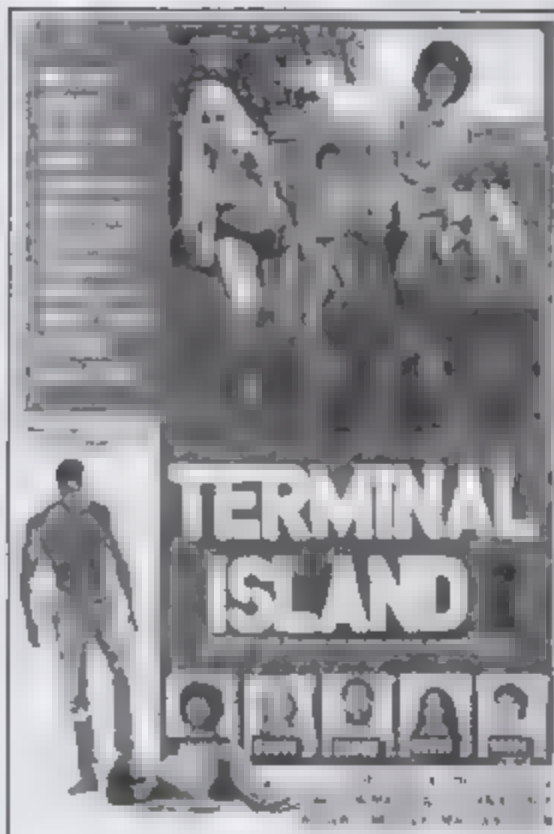
The story begins as Carmen (Ena Hartman), a foxy black militant is dumped from a motorboat on to the said island. The first castaway she sees—not counting the stray corpse floating near the shore, is none other than a bearded, dissolute Tom Selleck, light years away from his iconic TV hunk status as "Magnum P.I." Selleck plays Dr. Milford, a pathetic wreck of a man banished to the troubled paradise for an undisclosed "mercy killing." Declining Selleck's offer of homemade tweak, Carmen makes her way to the island's main encampment, a ruthless hippie commune presided over with Manson-like authority by Bobby (Sean Kenney). One of Bobby's main lieutenants is played by none other than Roger Moseley, sporting a daring-for-its time nose ring who would likewise go on to little screen fame on Selleck's *Magnum P.I.*

With a female population of five (one of whom includes Phyllis Davis from Russ Meyer's *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, 1971), the women are forced to do menial labor as well as satisfy the sexual needs of the men, servicing as many as four or five males a night. Things look grim until a rebel faction of convicts led by A.J. (Don Marshall) liberate the women and begin to plot Bobby's overthrow. Taking a page or two from the *Gilligan's Island* Professor's cookbook, these revolutionary guys and gals make some rustic hand grenades and gun powder, and the final battle for domination of *Terminal Island* begins.

With lots of feminist and leftist rhetoric delivered from curvaceous girls in halter tops and Daisy Dukes, to call *Terminal Island* "retro" or "out-of-date" has a poignant ring to many lifelong, native Californians. Often included in roundups of science-fiction films, *Terminal Island's* premise couldn't possibly be more off the mark. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, prisons are California's chief industry, just below oranges and movie stars. Small agricultural towns in California that have long been "farmed out" find a quick economic fix by throwing up a prison, transforming the once Golden State to an unbecoming Battleship Gray. A futuristic California that is little more than a gigantic penal institution, ala *Escape from New York* (1981) would be a far more likely and harrowing movie premise.

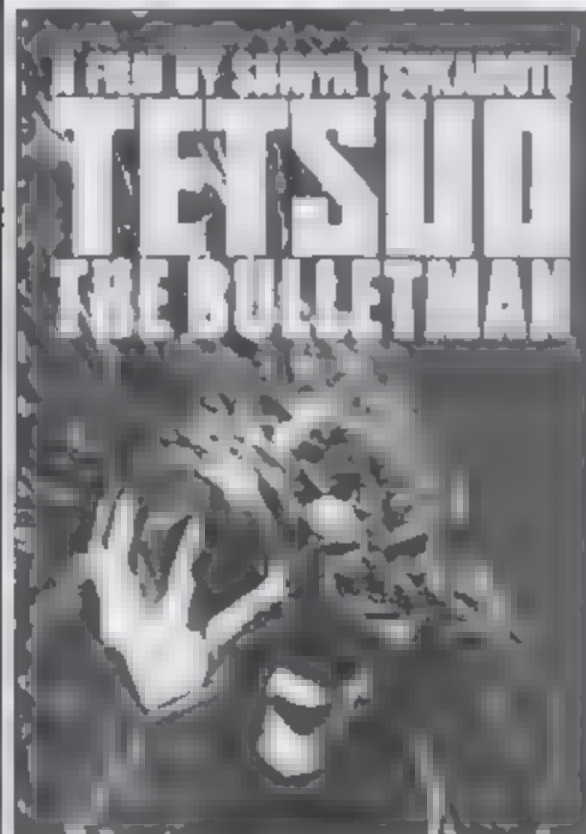
Code Red DVD has pulled out all the stops for this important exploitation title. There is a commentary track featuring director Scott Spiegel with the film's stars Don Marshall and Sean Kenney. Both Kenney and Marshall return with on-camera interviews that last about half an hour each. Among other stories, Kenney relates how he and Tom Selleck both found their most gainful employment as models for cigarette ads at the time *Terminal Island* was made. (It must also be noted that Selleck was paying his dues during this period in other exploitation films such as the Filipino horror film *Daughters of Satan* in 1972, as well as providing an afternoon delight for Mae West in the notorious *Myra Breckinridge* in 1970). Alas, Kenney's career trajectory followed a far dissimilar path from Selleck's as his only major film role proved to be the male lead in Ted V. Mikels' *The Corpse Grinders* in 1971. Marshall speaks mostly about his TV work including his regular stint on Irwin Allen's *Land of the Giants*. Phyllis Davis also contributes an audio-only telephone interview. There are also the expected trailers for other Code Red DVDs.

Greg Goodsell



## TETSUO: THE BULLET MAN

Directed by Shinya Tsukamoto  
(2010) Asmik Ace Entertainment all-region Blu-ray/DVD



Despite my respect for Japanese cult director Shinya Tsukamoto's work, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* would have best been left within the filmmaker's imagination. The third entry in his *Tetsuo* series, Tsukamoto revisits past ideas and concepts with his characteristically vibrant, visual sense and Chu Ishikawa's frenetically, rhythmic score, but sadly that's all there really is to admire in this rehash. The unfortunate transformation victim this time around is a young Japanese-American man named Anthony. Residing in Tokyo with his wife Yuriko and their toddler son, Anthony is a decent man who lives a sedate, urban life as an office worker.

As the film begins, both Anthony and Yuriko are haunted by a shared dream of their son's death. Worried, but seeking peace of mind, Anthony visits his eccentric, American father and brings his son along. While walking down a dark tunnel on the way home, a mysterious car attacks and tragically runs down the boy. Anthony is overcome with rage and with hallucinations of

his body transforming into some metal conglomerate. Time passes and while Anthony attempts to suppress his sadness and anger, Yuriko constantly compels him to seek vengeance. He eventually reaches his boiling point and the promised transformation (this being a *Tetsuo* film after all) begins. Pale skin turns mottled grey and black as cold metal overtakes his form, transforming from man into machine piece by piece.

Further complicating matters, both a delivery man assassin and a SWAT team make attempts on Anthony's life on behalf of a phantom company connected to his family's past. Thankfully, this new iron man's body sports a bevy of chest-mounted machine guns which unload volumes of ammunition upon attackers without mercy. Besides fighting off these attempts on his life, the transforming man must also contend with his son's killer (played by the director himself), who further goads Anthony's rage to complete the transformation for reasons left insufficiently explained. Despite crazy, fast-paced editing, an industrial score, and a few scenes of near full-on nudity, the film is not a homerun success.

To be fair, one's enjoyment here is entirely dependent on familiarity with the *Tetsuo* series up to this point. For those new to these films, *The Bullet Man* is an odd, semi-futuristic sci-fi/horror movie that contains frenetic sequences of gunplay-fueled carnage. For loyal fans who have followed the filmmaker since the original *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*, this latest entry is a slicker retread of previous themes without significantly expanding the series' mythology. To provide a little bit of background, Tsukamoto first made his name in cinematic circles in 1989 with *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*, his first feature after crafting a number of short films. Shot in black-and-white 16mm, *Tetsuo* is a surreal and mind-bending adventure seemingly crafted from pure nightmares. The plotline follows a lowly office worker terrorized by an insane freak known to fans as The Metal Fetishist (played by Tsukamoto himself). After their initial encounter, the worker's body begins sprouting various ungainly, metal growths which transform him from human into android. Unable to explain or prevent his transformation, the office worker is pursued by the Fetishist in a series of quick chase sequences. Both hunter and prey eventually face off and transform into behemoth, metal monstrosities who battle each other for nothing less than the world's fate.

With shades of early David Cronenberg and a little *Eraserhead* thrown into the mix, *Iron Man* is a bizarre exploration of the effects of industry on humanity, which can overtake nature and crush it. Metaphorical but also incredibly visceral, the original became a cult hit which is a fan favorite to this day. In 1992, Tsukamoto followed it up with *Tetsuo 2: Body Hammer*, which revisited the basic concept of an innocent man transforming into a metal creature, but injected back story to further clarify the plot.

*Bullet Man*, unfortunately, comes across as yet another iteration of the previous films; however, it lacks any new, significant contributions other than greater technical polish and slick, digital video cinematography versus gritty, 16mm film. Less a reboot than lazy rehash, Tsukamoto turns his back on nearly everything that made the original work, adding more back story and fairly conventional villains—neither of which enhance the experience. The unpredictability of *Iron Man* gives way to a formulaic plot structure, devoid of surprises. Moreover the performances are brittle with poorly-written English dialogue; while the director has allowed stylized acting in the past, the Western performers employed here (including Eric Bossick as Anthony) are unable to overcome rather wooden deliveries.

Only Tsukamoto, playing a variation of the same character within all three films (lending some greatly appreciated continuity), succeeds in conveying genuine creepiness and becomes a legitimate threat without resorting to transformation himself, despite the character's desire to do so. The shaky, POV shots are effective as is the frenzied editing and Ishikawa's beloved industrial-themed score, first employed in *Iron Man*.

The action sequences themselves shine as Anthony bounds around buildings, firing off ammunition and cutting his enemies quite literally to bloody pieces. The metal makeup effects are fairly efficient and employ little to no discernible CGI, so there remains a trace of the series' visceral horror as this man is increasingly buried under mounds of cold, hard iron. However with nothing fresh to add besides the original Nine Inch Nails end credit song (the group's first original recorded work in over two years), *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* is a film for completists alone who understand all the series' keystone concepts and are not interested in changes to the formula.

Todd Konrad



## THE UNDERTAKER

Directed by Franco Steffanino (aka Alan Smith)  
(1988) Code Red DVD

It wasn't until I watched the entire, convoluted film that I decided the unexpected introduction to *The Undertaker* by Robert Forster (who is not in this movie) was actually the *least* confusing part of the viewing experience. As Forster notes, *The Undertaker* marked the final appearance of actor Joe Spinell, and as such we should try and enjoy it. Honest, Mr. Forster, we tried—and the only reason we *did* try was because this is a Joe Spinell movie.

In his prime, Spinell was a bug-eyed force of nature who immediately grabbed your attention with his brief but memorable character turns in *The Godfather*, *Rocky*, and *Taxi Driver*. For horror fans, however he will always be defined by his performance as Frank Zito, the sweaty, bloated, deranged killer in William Lustig's *Maniac* (1980).

In *The Undertaker* (a.k.a. *Death Merchant*) Spinell is the even sweatier, more bloated, and more deranged Uncle Roscoe, a funeral director with a penchant for necrophilia who decides to "drum up business" by stalking and murdering attractive young women and storing their embalmed corpses in his secret basement laboratory.

When his nosy nephew (Patrick Askin) and the local police begin poking around the funeral home, Roscoe has to step up his game (and up his kill count), especially after he catches the attention of his nephew's college professor (Rebeca Yaron), who just happens to be teaching a course on necrophilia at the local university.

By the time he made *The Undertaker*, Spinell was overweight, drinking heavily, and mourning the loss of his recently deceased mother—and it shows. In some scenes he seems distracted, in others nearly somnambulant, slurring his words and stumbling over lines. At other times he shamelessly mugs for the camera, rolling his bulging eyes and leering at his co-stars and the audience.

It was likely Spinell's unreliable performance that led to erratic editing that transforms *The Undertaker* from what was probably a pedestrian slasher film into a jarring and surreal viewing experience. The film jumps abruptly from one scene to another with little explanation of who some of the characters even are. (Case in point: Who the heck is Hazel? Is she Spinell's wife? Mother? Sister?) Reaction shots are recycled throughout the film, as is the audio of Spinell muttering "Morons!" anytime he becomes annoyed. One actor disappears midway through the film, only to pop up again during the final minutes for a death scene that must have been meant to occur much earlier.

The film is also padded with gobs of footage of women in an aerobics class, and bits of footage from the creaky Bela Lugosi feature *The Corpse Vanishes* (1942), which is inexplicably playing a week's-long engagement at a repertory theater. As if that isn't enough, there's another lengthy sequence during which clips from *Africa Screams*, *Scared to Death* (1947), *Bedtime for Bonzo* (1951) and even *The Terror* (1963) appear on a TV set—it's like a Mill Creek public domain DVD collection condensed into a five minute collage.

It would be easy to blame director Franco Steffanino for the meandering direction, except that there is no such person. According to a highly informative article that Shock Cinema's Steve Puchalski wrote for *Fangoria* a few years back, several people directed *The Undertaker*, including the film's producers and screenwriter Kennedy.

Aside from the endless padding, the bland synthesizer score, and the lack of continuity, *The Undertaker* also offers us buckets and buckets of sweat. This may have been because the film was shot during the broiling summer of 1988, or because just standing in close proximity to Joe Spinell opened the pores of his co-stars. Screenwriter/actor William James Kennedy (appearing as a police detective) sports what can only be described as a halo of perspiration throughout, accomplishing what I would have previously thought impossible—he out-sweats Joe Spinell.

As a slasher film, *The Undertaker* doesn't have much to offer in the way of story, acting, suspense or even gore. What it *does* have is great end theme song, "Death Merchant," which is easily the equal to the ridiculous closing credit themes of *Howling II* and *My Bloody Valentine*. Just when I thought *The Undertaker* had almost nothing to offer me but soggy underarms, along came "Death Merchant" to put a smile on my face.

Code Red serves up this oddity in an okay-looking full-frame transfer (it appears to have been sourced from a tape master). Extras include the usual Code Red trailers (*The Carrier*, *Nightmare*, *Horror High*, *Slithis*, *The Visitor*) and a brief on-camera interview with Robert Forster and his daughter Kate, who discuss working with Joe Spinell on *Hollywood Harry*.

Strangely enough, a promo reel for the film (you can watch it on YouTube) includes snippets of several scenes that are clearly missing from this version of *The Undertaker*, indicating that the Code Red disc may not be the final word on this peculiar film, as there are at least two different cuts floating around.

Joe Spinell died just a few months after *The Undertaker* wrapped, which is a shame because although the movie's slapdash editing and tawdry subject matter make it worth at least one viewing, Spinell himself isn't much fun to watch here. I wish his final performance had been a better one; as it is, *The Undertaker* serves as a sad, confusing coda to the career of one of the screen's most engaging bad guys.

Brian Albright



## GIRLY

(aka MUMSY, NANNY, SONNY & GIRLY)

Directed by Freddie Francis  
(1970) Scorpion Releasing DVD

Scorpion Releasing has taken its cue from the long out-of-print Prism VHS release of this quirky obscurity: first by shortening the film's ever-so-British title for American consumption; and then by promoting it with cover art which suggests a significantly more gruesome shocker than the one that actually appears on the disc. Packaging notwithstanding Scorpion's widescreen restoration retains the full, original title card, but the abbreviated *Girly* moniker (as video-burned on the Prism tape) appears amongst the DVD supplements.

The title family is the picture of upper-class domestic bliss: Mumsy (Ursula Howells) and Nanny (Pat Heywood) mind the mansion while the "dear children" Sonny and Girly (Howard Trevor and Vanessa Howard) regularly go out to make friends—whom they bring home for tea and games. But what if their new friends don't want to play by the rules? Perhaps it's time for a round of "Here comes a candle to light you to bed/Here comes a chopper to chop of your head!" Or maybe a less-than-sporting bout of hunting straight out of *The Most Dangerous Game* is in the cards.

However, when the latest "New Friend" (Michael Bryant as a well-to-do playboy given no other name) is assimilated into the arrangement, things don't quite go according to the family's plans. Though initially at their mercy (his lady friend is killed by "accident" and he's quickly blackmailed over the deed), he proves more than adept at winning Girly's genuine affection—can he continue from there to successfully manipulate the various members of the household against each other?

*Girly* (to use the short title) amuses well enough for a while, but the sketchiness of the characters (as indicated by their very names—or lack thereof) eventually takes its toll. Is this an actual family (and servant) who just happen to share the same strain of mental illness? Are these misfits who happened to meet up and agreed to take on certain roles? The answers to these and many other questions remain mysteries—and for that matter, we're given precious



little material over which to even speculate. In the meantime, plenty of grisly action is suggested but never actually shown—and as the film never tries for (or at least, never attains) compelling human drama, that's a bone that the average viewer might have appreciated being tossed at the very least. On the plus side, director Francis (who left the photography to David Muir) opens the play *Happy Family* up from its stage origins, allowing us a trip to the zoo and a welcome appearance by Michael Ripper (as a caretaker) among other diversions. But it's Howard (*The Blood Beast Terror*)'s show all the way—the provocative, playful, perpetually-mini-skirted Girly is both pleasing to the eye and capable of commanding attention throughout the proceedings. Unfortunately for us, she soon afterwards dismissed her acting career as a passing fancy—her last recorded appearance was opposite Shane Briant in the Dan Curtis television adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1973).

In addition to the attractive widescreen (1:78:1) transfer and the aforementioned *Girly* title card, Scorpion supplies half-hour interviews with screenwriter Comport (video) and Francis (archival recordings), theatrical trailers in English and Spanish, a TV spot and trailers for other Scorpion/Cinerama releases.

Shane M. Dallmann



## DOGTOOTH (aka Kynodontas)

Directed by Yorgos Lanthimos  
(2009) Kino International Blu-ray

The torture chambers and mad scientist laboratories of *Martyrs* (2008) and *Human Centipede: First Section* (2009) are replaced with a bourgeois Greek villa with extremely ugly furniture in *Dogtooth*, which is every inch a horror film. Befuddled critics have labeled the film a "comedy," but *Dogtooth* is a relentless nightmare. The mislabeling can be attributed to the fact that most horror films have catharsis, where as *Dogtooth* only offers more layers of suffocating dread.

*Dogtooth* focuses on an extremely bizarre household where a father (Christos Stergioglou) and mother (Michelle Valley—who played an entirely different sort of "mother" in the 1991 cult classic *Singapore Sling*) who keep their three adult children—a son (Hristos Passalis) and two daughters (Aggeliki Papoulia, Mary Tsoni) housed entirely on their rambling estate. The children have never ventured forth from the high fence surrounding the property, the parents telling them they will only be able to leave when they lose their dogteeth.

The preceding hideous fairy tale is just one of countless ruses the mother and father sink to in order to keep their brood in line. They also tell the children that they have a brother on the other side of the fence, and when he is "killed" by a ferocious cat (to whom the son kills with gardening shears), they are told to walk on all fours and bark like ferocious dogs in images that recall other features about torture and imprisonment, *Human Centipede* and *Salo: The 120 Days of Sodom* (1975).

A female security guard (Anna Kalaitzidou) that works at the father's factory is later recruited to satisfy the son's sexual needs. After a series of the least erotic sex scenes ever filmed, the audience expects the guard to leak stories about the sadistic arrangement to her friends and coworkers—instead, she seizes the opportunity to exploit the situation for her own needs!

In the meantime, the audience waits fruitlessly for the children to wise up, and empower themselves. Finding videos of *Rocky* (1976) and *Jaws* (1975) in the guard's backpack, the eldest daughter (Papoulia) begins to get an inkling of the outside world. In movie geek fashion, she quotes movie dialogue to her uncomprehending siblings. She is found out and is severely disciplined by the father in one of the few outbursts of violence in the film, in a display of the casual brutality the parents must doubtlessly dole out to keep their children insulated.

Finally—there is an escape attempt involving some extremely painful self-inflicted violence, and we, the audience cheer on the plot development—but *Dogtooth* is not done with us just yet.

Filmed in droning, endless long takes in harsh, relentless sunshine in an unspecified time period—everything appears to be analog, with the VCR and tape recorder used to instruct the children and the home's sole, hidden telephone has a dial—*Dogtooth* inflicts as much suffering on the audience as it does the captive children. Is this a good thing? The filmmakers are obviously addressing the lengths repressive authority figures take—in the form of either government and/or religion—to keep their subjects in perpetual childhood "innocence," where innocence is definitely a very, very bad thing. The film's theme is more relevant now than ever, with countries in North Africa and the Middle East deciding en masse to revolt against their 11<sup>th</sup> century living conditions with the sudden introduction of smart phones and the Internet.

Some of the blame must reside with the children in the film, which like their teenage counterparts in *Salo* act along with their oppressors in the hope that things will improve. Children who live at home with their parents far past childhood certainly sacrifice freedom and independence in exchange for a roof over their heads and a hot meal to a certain extent. Are the children here an example of young people who are terrified of the outside world and unquestionably accept their bizarre living conditions? *Dogtooth* poses many questions that only the individual can answer after much reflection.

As such, the film can be recommended to audiences who afterwards will absolutely hate it—the majority of *Dogtooth*'s power lies in the fact that it doesn't care if you enjoy it or not.

Blu-ray extras include an interview with director Lanthimos; deleted scenes; photo gallery; and, the film's theatrical trailer.

Greg Goodsell



## THE BLACK SLEEP

Directed by Reginald Le Borg  
(1956) MGM made-on-demand DVD-R

When *The Black Sleep* went into production in the summer of 1955, the golden age of horror was in transition. Universal's two decades of "classic horror" were a year away from being sold to television syndication by way of the package title *Shock Theater*. And sadly, the careers of Basil Rathbone, Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney Jr., Tor Johnson, and John Carradine had seen better days as their fortunes dipped to lesser (and often embarrassing) horror fare (although Carradine would continue to shine in several non-horror movies during the 60s).

*The Black Sleep* (aka *Dr. Cadman's Secret* for a 1962 re-release), was part of a four-picture distribution deal by producers Aubrey Schenck and Howard W. Koch with United Artists. The film appeared to many observers as either a day late and a dollar short, or a last spirted attempt to recapture the golden age's luster. On the surface, it appeared to be the former.

Director Reginald Le Borg (*The Mummy's Ghost*) and writer John C. Higgins (*Murder Man*, and years later *Daughters Of Satan*) were older genre hands who had thrived in the 40s and 50s. And when Bela Lugosi (his last film role unless you count the "lost" footage that would appear years later in *Plan Nine from Outer Space*), Basil Rathbone, Lon Chaney Jr., John Carradine, and Tor Johnson signed up, visions of a true monster mash ala *House Of Frankenstein* suddenly sprang eternal. When Peter Lorre dropped out of the film because of budget breaking salary demands, genre notable Akim Tamiroff stepped into the cast.

The film (in arresting black and white) opens in early 19th century England where respected doctor Sir Joel Cadman (Rathbone) pays a visit to a prison where a former colleague, Dr. Gordon Ramsey (the always reliable Herbert Rudley), is hours away from being hanged for a crime he insists he did not commit. Cadman gives Ramsey a potion that, he claims, will ease the suffering of the hangman's noose. The next morning Ramsey is found dead in his cell and is brought back to life two days later by Cadman, aided by small-time crook Odo (Tamiroff). Cadman explains that the potion is a powerful anesthetic he calls The Black Sleep. He further pontificates that he saved Ramsey's life so that he could help him in some super secret research he is doing in an isolated retreat.

Ramsey gratefully agrees, and soon finds himself at the fog-shrouded abode of Cadman, where he encounters the mute man-servant Casimir (Lugosi), loyal assistant Daphnae (Phyllis Stanley), comely assistant Laurie (Patricia Blake), and a brute named Mungo (Chaney Jr.), who seemingly takes every opportunity to attack Laurie. Shortly after arrival, we discover that Cadman has been conducting brain experiments on involuntary human subjects (supplied by Odo), in an attempt to discover a cure for his wife, who has lapsed into a coma as the result of a brain tumor.

As *Frankenstein* influenced storylines go, so far so good, but this is the point of the picture where *The Black Sleep* lapses into predictability. In short order, Ramsey witnesses an experiment on a "supposedly" dead body, but rebels when he realizes the patient is still alive. Cadman puts him in his place with the importance of experimentation (and a not too veiled threat of blowing his cover to the local authorities), and Ramsey grudgingly goes along. In due course, he discovers that Laurie is actually the daughter of Mungo, who is actually the respected Doctor Monroe, the victim of one of Cadman's experiments that have reduced his subjects to degenerative and mutilated states.

Ramsey and Laurie go into the basement where they encounter Carradine, Johnson, the recent lab rat George Sayawa (who is now sporting pretty good mutilated face makeup), and a female subject (Sally Yarnell), who does a decent job of screaming and acting demented. The Carradine character spouts a mad stanza of Shakespearean lines. Ramsey and Laurie are suddenly confronted by Cadman, Daphnae, and Mungo. Laurie is spirited upstairs to be the final experiment to revive Cadman's wife, while Ramsey watches helplessly in the clutches of Mungo.

At this point the All-Star monster party kicks in, as a conveniently dropped key allows all the mutants to escape. They charge upstairs, and engage in a tussle with Daphnae (which results in her catching on fire). The motley crew climb to the laboratory and attack and kill Mungo, which allows Ramsey to escape and liberate Laurie from the operating table (just as Cadman appears with the body of his wife in his arms). The monsters charge Cadman, who falls down a stairwell to his death with his wife in tow. British bobbies arrive, the monsters are rounded up, and Ramsey and Laurie walk hand in hand into the sunset just as the timer on *The Black Sleep* hits the 82 minute mark.

*The Black Sleep* is not the perfect beast. While consistent with the 50s sense of traditional Universal horror, in a modern viewing, it can't help but feel strangely out of place. It is competently made, and all the actors do their best to work with a lame script. But it is Rathbone who makes the most of a role he had basically done several times over the years. With the exception of Tamiroff's spirited Odo (the bad guy you want to like), there really is not much for anybody to do except go through the motions.

Lugosi in his final outing is given nothing to do but take people's coats and announce the arrival of the next character or story point. The other actors don't fare much better. Chaney Jr.'s Mungo is a one-note hulk; Tor Johnson does what he pretty much always did, growl, thrash around and attack. Only Carradine strikes some sparks, giving his lines some real verve while looking all wide-eyed and hairy.

MGM's made-on-demand DVD is presented as fullscreen which offers a durable version of the film as it appeared in theaters. The only extra is a trailer.

Marc Shapiro





## SOYLENT GREEN

Directed by Richard Fleischer  
(1973) Warner Bros. Blu-ray

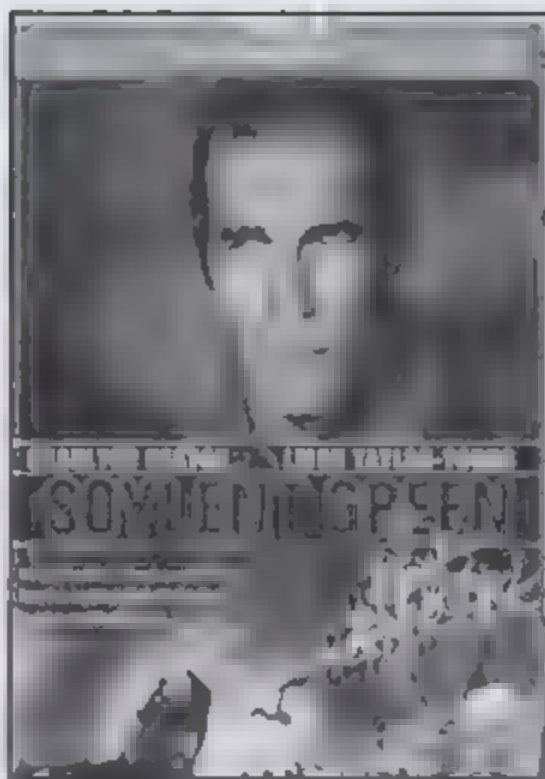
Is there anybody reading this who is *not* familiar with this movie and does *not* know the famous catchphrase? If so, this review is for you. Get a hold of *Soylent Green* and watch it before anybody else has a chance to spoil it for you. I was lucky enough to catch it on its first network television broadcast and was suitably surprised and impressed

Harry Harrison's 1966 novel *Make Room! Make Room!* was a bleak vision of a hopelessly overpopulated, resource-depleted future—the movie adaptation derived its title from a nutritious vegetable compound (simply a cross between 'soybean' and 'lentil') craved by the masses in the book. The novel concerned a murder investigation carried out by New York police detective Andy Rusch—this central plot idea was retained for the film version, with the detective's name changed to Robert Thorn. And after immortalizing "Take your stinking paws off me, you damn dirty ape!" and going through hell as *The Omega Man*, Charlton Heston was a natural to take on this latest cinematic dystopia in that role. Also carried over from the Harrison original are Thorn's elderly roommate Sol (Edward G. Robinson in his last role), here a knowledgeable professor known as a "book," and the concept of "furniture girls" who come with luxurious property when it's purchased by the privileged few (Leigh Taylor-Young has a crucial supporting role as Shirl, one such piece of decoration). While the setting and these specifics are enough to qualify *Soylent Green* as an official adaptation of Robinson's book, virtually everything else was re-invented for the screen.

In the film, the murder victim is a government official (Joseph Cotten as Simonson), and there are plenty of reasons why certain parties (including Chuck Connors) would rather Stone accept the quickie verdict of a random burglary and leave it at that. But Stone is doggedly determined to uncover the actual motive for the slaying—and with the loyal assistance of Sol, a less-than-enthusiastic hand from Shirl (Simonson's death has made her a piece of furniture between owners) and the grudging respect of police chief Hatcher (Brock Peters), he's going to learn far more than is good for him.

The mechanics of the investigation are carried out efficiently enough by director Richard Fleischer, but it's the future hell itself that everybody remembers. Streets and stairways are capacity-crammed with the homeless; food riots ("The supply of Soylent Green has been exhausted!") are quashed with huge steam shovels that quite literally scoop the populace away; actual meat and produce are unthinkable delicacies; and everyone is bathed in a constant sheen of sweat, save for those lucky few who can actually afford to live lives of ridiculous luxury (their existence isn't very far removed from 'la dolce vita' as depicted by Norman Jewison two years later in *Rollerball*, another look at the future which failed on first release but gained plenty of stature over the decades). The atmosphere is so successfully oppressive that when we finally see the idyllic (though artificial) "crossing over" experience provided for those who don't wish to remain in this world, the offer seems mighty attractive, indeed. (Look for an uncredited Dick Van Patten during this sequence.)

Today, the shortcomings of *Soylent Green* are inescapable, but that's not the fault of anyone involved in the production—the film has simply dated in ways its makers couldn't anticipate. Most glaringly, the crucial material on which the investigation hinges exists in the form of several large, hardbound volumes of government paperwork which must be pilfered from the archives—today, of course, one would use cyber hacking technology to get this information... hell, it would probably show up on Wikileaks without anyone even asking for it! Perhaps to address such concerns, a remake of *Soylent Green* has been announced for 2012. And thereby hangs a question while this is one of those movies that certainly *could* benefit from a contemporary remake, does it have even a chance of playing to an audience that doesn't know it by heart? Consider the jury out. But see *this* one if you haven't already. New extras on the Blu-ray edition of *Soylent Green* include: the film's original theatrical trailer; an audio commentary track by Richard Fleischer and Leigh Taylor-Young; and the featurettes *A Look at the World of Soylent Green* and *A Tribute to Edward G. Robinson*.



Shane M. Dallmann

## TONY

Directed by Gerald Johnson  
(2009) Revolver Entertainment DVD

The fact that shy Londoner Tony (Peter Ferdinando) is a serial killer is only a small part of who he really is. When he isn't killing people and saving their corpses for a late night snuggle in front of the telly, he's busy avoiding gainful employment for the past 20 plus years, rebuffing the kindly advances of his neighbors, cruising the local gay bar for tricks, tying up phone sex lines with endless, inane questions whenever he isn't tending to his squalid council flat. Chiefly, Tony watches American action films on VHS. Unable to interest his acquaintances in watching *Enemy Territory* (1987), a grade-Z programmer starring "Ghostbusters" singer Ray Parker Jr in an ill-advised bid for macho man screen roles, Tony takes the hammer to them, cuts them into tiny pieces and then throws their remains in bright blue plastic bags into the nearby River Thames.

Among the countless other low-budget films on serial killers these days, *Tony* has two things to its advantage. Peter Ferdinando's performance in the lead role is at once horrifying, hilarious and desperately sad. Bad haircut, fly spectacles, malnourished moustache, pale skin and clothes spotted with grime, Tony is the type of person you would cross the street to avoid—even if you *didn't* know he kept severed limbs in his dresser. Many films on killers be they real or fictional, attempt to humanize their subjects and show their motivations as to what drove them to murder. *Tony*, the film, keeps its subject at arm's length, and while there are scenes where the audience feels pity for the protagonist, we can't totally sympathize with him. Over and over again, people try to reach out to help him, only to be pushed away by his asocial ineptitude.

Two scenes in particular are especially telling. Tony's attempts at securing the service of a female prostitute (Lucy Flack) end disastrously after he asks her a series of disjointed, irrational questions ("Have you ever slept with black or Chinese men?"). In another scene, a hunky gay bar pickup (Lorenzo Camporese) literally throws himself at our hero's feet—this gentleman must have a fetish for R. Crumb types—only to be violently rejected. Tony doesn't appear to know what he wants, unless there's the fresh aroma of decay wafting from it. These scenes seem to drive home the point that maybe the poor kid who was bullied in school had a very good reason for being bullied.

Secondly, *Tony* addresses the setting that allows killers such as these to go unchecked. The majority of victims Tony chooses are people no one will miss. In one telling scene, Tony even lets one of his victims escape his sublet of horrors alive, confident that he won't go to the authorities. The last victim the audience sees Tony kill will be definitely harder to cover up, and there's reason to believe that his reign of terror is swiftly drawing to a close—as the film abruptly ends on a "happy" ending, in a subplot totally unconnected with Tony.

Director Gerald Johnson in interviews has admitted that the character of Tony is freely based on British gay serial killer Dennis Nilsen. Likewise a lonely nerd, Nilsen claimed he kept the corpses of his victims in a hedge against loneliness. Nilsen was eventually undone when neighbors complained of the stench from his backed-up drains later revealed to be filled with body parts. This is alluded to in the film whenever anyone enters Tony's apartment. "Cor what's that smell?" "Drains!"

A merciful 76 minutes in length, *Tony* is guaranteed to provide viewers with lots of yucks—of both the hilarious and disgusted variety.

The U.S. domestic DVD release of *Tony* includes the short film, *Mug* (2004), by director Johnson with many of the same cast members and features an especially gruesome twist ending. The short film that led to the feature-length version of *Tony* is also included, which is a brief snippet of part of the longer film's story, albeit set in a far nicer council flat.

Greg Goodsell



## BEST WORST MOVIE

Directed by Michael Stephenson  
(2010) New Video Group DVD

The Story: Youthful boy hero Joshua (Michael Stephenson) troubled by nightmarish nighttime visions of goblins travels with his family for a relaxing vacation in the rural town of Nilbog. Joshua fears that the town of Nilbog (spell it backwards) hides a diabolical secret. Seeking counsel from his dearly departed Grandpa Seth (Robert Ormsby) through an enchanted mirror, Joshua's jocular dad (George Hardy), not-all-there mom (Margo Prey) and precocious teenage sister (Connie Young) shine him on in favor of the town's folksy homespun hospitality. Joshua quickly discovers that Nilbog is indeed a secret hotbed of demonic activity, as the town of goblins—strict herbivores, and insufferably vegetarian, magically transform their human victims into plants prior to devouring them whole. Will Joshua be able to convince his disbelieving family before they're all transformed into garden salad?

The Story Behind the Story: Italian director Claudio Fragasso, whose only previous credit of note to American audiences was the forgettable *Monster Dog* (1984) starring rock star Alice Cooper, rolled into Utah with an Italian crew to lens his horror opus *Goblin* circa 1989. Hiring regional actors, Fragasso corralled his inexperienced cast, an Italian crew with minimal English skills, very little money and no discernible talent for a three-week shoot. The resulting project was an unspeakable amalgam of wretched performances, direction, scripting and special effects. Like many films of this ilk, *Goblin*, now rechristened *Troll 2* in an attempt to associate itself with Charles Band's winsome—but competent *Troll* (1986), crept into VHS rental shops without fanfare.

The Story Behind the Story Behind the Story: In a cynical Internet age where irony is a top commodity, *Troll 2* wins a new legion of fans as a cult classic. Revived at repertory theaters nationwide, fans arrive in droves to holler out their favorite bits of tin-eared dialogue in the manner of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975).

Michael Stephenson, now a grown adult and trying to make sense of the whole misadventure, gathers his fellow cast members for a motion picture documentary in the wake of the film's newfound fame. Focusing largely on his onscreen father George Hardy, now living successfully and anonymously as a small town dentist in Alabama, *Best Worst Movie* relentlessly examines how *Troll 2* didn't further the cause of anyone involved. The old saying of "laugh and the whole world laughs with you—cry, and you cry alone" takes on stinging significance as the viewer—more than likely composed of camp enthusiasts who made *Troll 2* the sensation it is today—is shown how the principals did not benefit in any way for their participation.

Focusing primarily on *Troll 2*'s actors, very few went on to have careers. Connie Young went on to act in other films, but assiduously avoids listing the film on her resume. Scenes of people cackling at midnight screenings are offset by scenes of stunted thespians now living in poverty and obscurity, *Troll 2*'s current notoriety not translating into any monetary compensation or further offers for other roles.

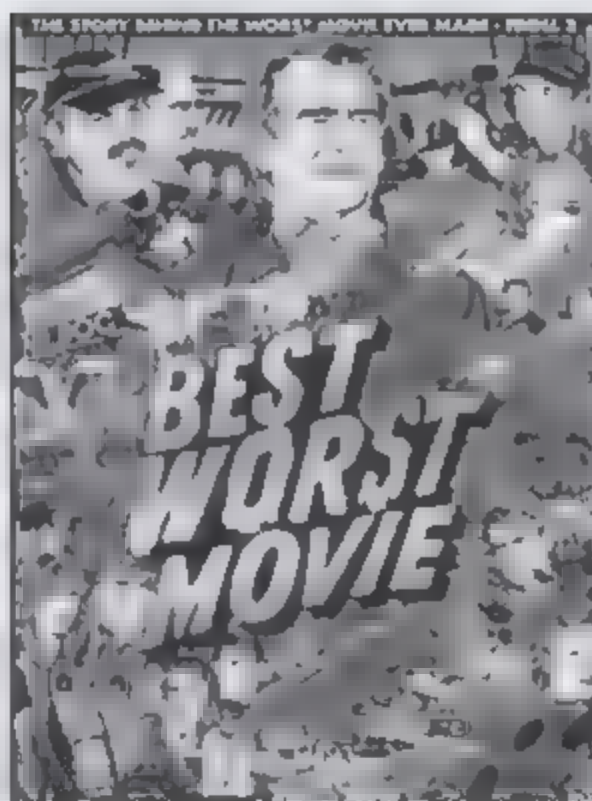
*Best Worst Movie* visits the still-living actor who played Grandpa Seth, Robert Ormsby, living in his book-lined home waiting for the fall of the Grim Reaper's scythe. Figuring that his only tangible legacy was his role in *Troll 2*, Ormsby is brutally, existentially forthright in the conclusion that his life was meaningless. *Best Worst Movie*'s true heart of darkness is the interview with Margo Prey, whose performance as the unbalanced mom was far more unsettling than any of the *Goblin 2*'s monsters. Still living at home with her elderly mother Prey prattles on in a disjointed fashion in an ugly kitchen with pictures of cats taped to cupboards.

On a personal level—as an ardent member of those who love to uproariously laugh at bad, awful movies, this writer just couldn't cotton up to *Troll 2*. I viewed said film on a double-feature DVD with Band's original *Troll* and it immediately struck me as a children's film with unsuitably crass elements, such as the notoriously unseen act where the hero urinates over goblin-contaminated food, prompting the film's most memorable line, "You don't piss on hospitality!" In particular, the monsters, comprised of fixed-expression rubber masks available at any Halloween store only added insult to injury. John Carl Buechler, the special effects man behind most of the era's grade B through Z monster flicks would have insisted on a few paltry bladder effects at the very least. I freely admit that once the Queen of the Druids (Deborah Reed) showed up, mugging ferociously as if performing on a low-rent kiddie TV show, I abandoned the film altogether.

*Best Worst Movie* the DVD has the most extensive extras section in recent memory. Chief among them are interviews with actors who used their experiences on the film to pursue other acting work. Mike Hamill, memorable as the anti-meat proselytizing preacher in *Troll 2* would later go on to write and direct his own feature *Reflections in the Mud* (2009). These bits counteract the smell of failure that taints the surviving cast members. There is over an Hour of Exclusive Bonus Features Including: audio commentary with the Filmmaker; Deleted Scenes and Interviews. Rest assured, this is a Desert Island disc, where the extras are the *raison d'être*, up to the consumer to enjoy and discover.

Christopher Guest, who specializes in "mock-umentaries" that catalog fictional personal and artistic disasters such as *This Is Spinal Tap!* (1984) and *Waiting for Guffman* (1996) could scarcely make a film as hilarious—and as heartbreakingly sad as *Best Worst Movie*. And, unlike the titular creatures in *Troll 2*, it's all real. In conclusion, there's little mystery as to why *Best Worst Movie* landed on so many Ten Best Lists.

Greg Goodsell



## SPIRITS OF THE DEAD

Directed by Roger Vadim,  
Louis Malle, Federico Fellini  
(1968) Arrow Films (Blu-Ray all-region import)

Common wisdom prevails in the idea that it's easy to dismiss two-thirds of *Spirits of the Dead* for the last mesmerizing short of this portmanteau: Federico Fellini's magnificent *Toby Dammit*. Indeed, it is the most transcendent, even if it barely uses the Edgar Allan Poe story "He Who Bets The Devil His Head" on which it's nominally based. (Then again, the other two stray from their source material, if not to the extreme as Fellini.) Roger Vadim's adaptation of "Metzengerstein" retains the notion of feuding neighbors, but piles on a lushly realized tense eroticism between Countess Federica (Jane Fonda, then Vadim's wife, fresh off of *Barbarella*) and the Baron Wilhelm (Peter Fonda). It's the weakest of the trio, though Claude Renoir's cinematography is a major plus in charting what amounts to some chaste debauchery. Overall, "Metzengerstein" has a prevailing lulling calmness where a more energetic tale might prove more suitable to the start of a horror trilogy. Louis Malle, who later admitted he made some swift directorial decisions based solely on commercialization, offers up "William Wilson" One of the most renowned *doppelgänger* stories in history, Malle casts heartthrob Alain Delon as the man in question. Never resorting to optical effects to "double up" Delon, Malle instead makes a more straightforward episode with an urging sense of paranoia and disbelief. One of Malle's concessions to the producers is in the casting of Brigitte Bardot as Giuseppina—here with dark locks instead of her trademark golden. Her role is a trifle, and it barely registers, though her name surely meant more on the marquee and one-sheet. And then we come to *Toby Dammit*. Terence Stamp, replacing Peter O'Toole at the last minute, portrays a disillusioned Shakespearean-turned-big-screen star frustrated with his own success. We follow what turns out to be his last day on earth as he's picked up from the airport, driven to a press conference, then awards show, before finally speeding off in the payment for his latest film—a Ferrari. It's an enigmatic gem, over-lit in a way that suggests all of the spotlights are constantly shone on Dammit. A lot of ink has been spilled of the comparisons to the creepy little girl here with a similar apparition in Mario Bava's *Kill, Baby Kill*, and you won't find me quibbling with the steal/homage. (Tim Lucas eloquently writes about this far better than I in his liner notes, taken from his comprehensive back-history/review for *Video Watchdog*). Speaking of extras, we also get Vincent Price's narration for the American-International release, international theatrical trailers, and the original stories by Poe in a booklet that also contains the aforementioned Lucas piece, and 'Literature and Cinema' by scholar Peter Bondanella.

Aaron Graham





## ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS

Directed by Byron Haskin  
(1964) The Criterion Collection Blu-ray

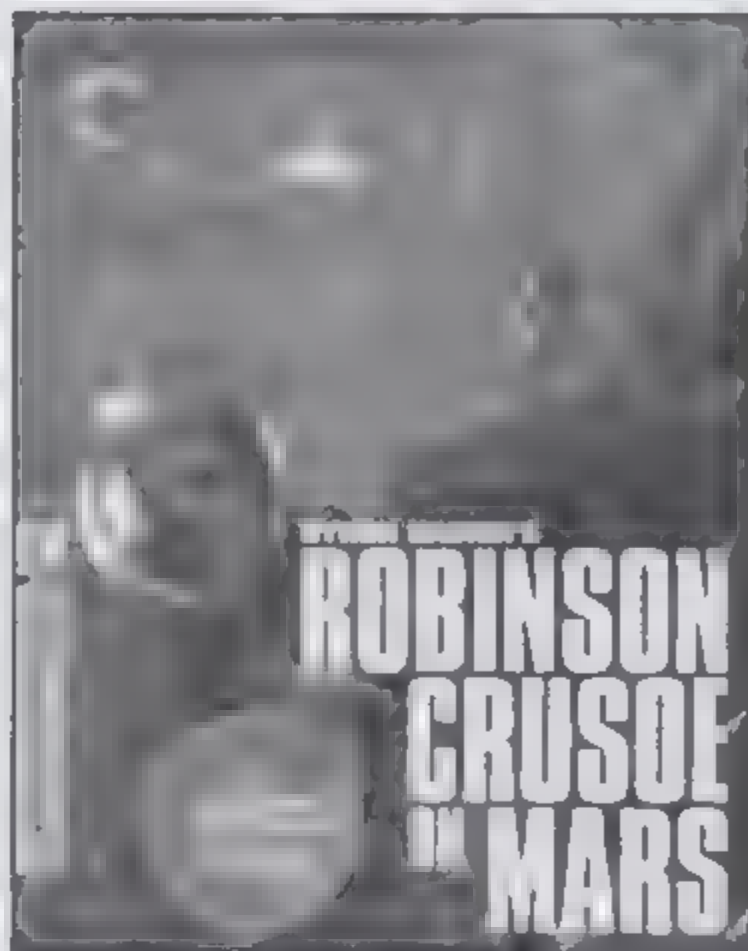
When Criterion released a special two disc edition of *Equinox* several years ago, thousands of film nerds expressed their disapproval in a way that only film nerds can—through a shrill sense of superiority and entitlement. “How could Criterion release such a terrible film” they would hiss. Well, here’s why: *Equinox* is significant in that it launched the careers of special effects artists Jim Danforth and Dave Allen. It’s also, in spite of its glaring flaws, a genuinely fun and entertaining movie that was responsible for inspiring the beloved *Evil Dead* series. *Equinox* wasn’t a great film, but it wasn’t mediocre either. It also made a surprising impact on our pop-cultural landscape and deserves to be preserved and appreciated by future generations. So come on nerds, give *Equinox* a break! Besides, if you want to jump all over a bad sci-fi movie that has inexplicably received the Criterion treatment, why not jump all over *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*? It’s nearly two hours of a wheezing man carrying around a monkey in a space suit, for crying out loud!

Although shot in 1964, *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* resembles any random sci-fi film from the 50s, right down to the specious science, and the implication that space travel isn’t space travel until someone forces an animal into an orange suit. As the film opens, Commander Kit Draper (Paul Mantee), Col. Dan McReady (the great Adam West in one of his earliest screen appearances), and Dan’s pet monkey Mona, are orbiting Mars on behalf of some kind of vague exploratory mission. A malfunction causes the trio to eject with only Kit and Mona surviving. Kit gathers together what little supplies he has (which includes a revolver—a NASA issue revolver presumably. What’s the purpose of that? To deter alien claim-jumpers from space-raiding his cosmic gold mine?) in order to survive this hostile alien environment that bares a striking resemblance to Death Valley. Along the way, Kit adapts to this new world by sucking the oxygen out of yellow pumice, discovering how to make a fire (why bother trying to figure out how to start a fire when the planet is literally covered in fire?), is haunted by an undead Adam West, and befriends a seemingly mute humanoid slave he dubs Friday (Victor Lundin). Actually befriends isn’t the correct term, it’s more like Kit begrudgingly tolerates Friday. Kit is instantly hostile towards Friday, and condescends to him throughout the film. Kit even calls Friday “retarded” at one point. Eventually, Friday’s alien masters realize he’s gone missing, so they track him down. Instead of simply landing their spaceships (which are the exact same spaceships used in director Byron Haskin’s earlier film *War of the Worlds*) and searching the area on foot, the aliens decide to just hover in mid air and randomly blast the hell out of the surrounding landscape, allowing Kit and Friday to escape through the abandoned Martian canal system. If not for severe audience disinterest, Kit and Friday would’ve experienced further tepid adventures in *Robinson Crusoe and the Invisible Galaxy*.

An unimaginative and thoroughly dull updating of Daniel Defoe’s fictional autobiography, *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* one slight saving grace is the fact that the production design is very easy on the eyes, and resembles a view-master reel come to life. It’s a shame that everything that happens within those attractively kitschy sets is so lifeless and inert. Particularly Mantee—whose character’s hardships are never particularly compelling, mostly because Kit is such an unlikable oaf, his death could only come as a relief (and make the nearly two hour running time that much shorter). The film is also implicitly racist—much like the *Phantom Menace* disguises an ethnic stereotype as an alien. Friday is basically a space “injun” who speaks in an “ugh-me-scalpum-in-many-moons” type cadence, and is blindly subservient to Kit. It’s offensive and stupid, and only underlines just how creatively bankrupt the filmmakers were.

All of which still leads me to wonder why is this film on the Criterion label—and on Blu-ray to boot! Was this a childhood favorite for somebody at the company? Or did they think it would be hilarious if they released this ironically? Could somebody tell me? Because *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* is not the kind of film that deserves the same kind of treatment reserved for legitimate genre classics like *The Thief of Baghdad* and *The Eyes Without a Face*. It would find a better home one those “20 Sci-Fi Films for Ten Bucks” box sets you find at Dollar General.

Mike Sullivan



## QUEEN OF BLOOD

Directed by Curtis Harrington  
(1966) MGM DVD-R  
made-on-demand media

A lot has been made of the fact that *Alien* (1979) was basically a big budget remake of the much smaller *It!*: *The Terror From Beyond Space* (1958) and, it could also be argued, Mario Bava’s *Planet Of The Vampires* (1965). But if Ridley Scott were being totally honest, he would have to cop to the fact that, even on a shoestring budget of \$50,000, the atmospheric, and often pretty surreal, science fiction/vampire quickie *Queen Of Blood* must have given him a creative idea or two.

Originally released by A.I.P. in 1966 as part of a double bill with *Blood Bath* (and available for the first time in the US through MGM Entertainment), the 81-minute film is the perfect example of style over substance. Curtis Harrington (director and writer of *Queen*) was no stranger to the exploitation world, having turned the likes of *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* and *What’s the Matter with Helen?* into primitive, raw art pieces.

But with *Queen Of Blood*, the stage was set for a truly challenging pallet. For openers, it was an American International production, which means Harrington knew going in that there would be very little time and even less money. The movie was a cut and paste job in which pieces of other films are inserted into a brand new storyline, often to pad out a film to feature length and more often to save money. It was Roger Corman’s stock in trade for a while. And, for *Queen*, the outer space and planetary sequences came courtesy of two Russian obscurities, *Meshte* (1963) and *Neb Zovyot* (1960). But it was to Harrington’s credit that he took this mixing and matching seriously and the result is a film that has a largely seamless look to it, even when played off the lower budget, futuristic sets that are the backbone of the film.

*Queen Of Blood* is a fairly simple premise. In the far flung future of 1990, when the International Institute Of Space Technology receives a message from space by an alien race that is travelling to earth to meet us, the world is primed for an historic meeting of two worlds. But when a video log arrives shortly thereafter, revealing that the alien craft has crashed on Mars, an earth rescue mission is quickly put together by institute head Dr. Farraday (Basil Rathbone) with astronauts Laura James (Judith Meredith) and Paul Grant (Dennis Hopper), and scientist Anders Brockman (Robert Boon). The ship soon lands on the Red Planet where they find an alien spacecraft with a dead alien on board.

End of story? Not by a long shot. Through a kind of logic that quite literally cuts to the chase, Farraday and backup astronauts Allen Brenner (John Saxon) and Tony Barrata (Don Eitner) determine that an assistant ship should go to Phobos, one of Mar’s moons, to aid in the recovery. Once on Phobos, the backup team discovers a craft that is foreign to them, its inhabitant is a green alien woman (Florence Marley), who is unconscious, but seemingly very much alive. After a weight issue results in Tony being left on Phobos while Allen takes the green alien to Mars, the crew quickly readies to blast off for earth with their “discovery” in tow.

If all this sounds like a long set up well, it is. Easily half of the film is taken up with getting everybody within striking distance of the titular Queen. But once the ship blasts off for earth (and effectively eliminating the Tony stranded on Phobos storyline without resolution), some very creepy bloodletting, amid low-budget ship bulkheads, begins to unfold. Paul Grant (a young and very restrained Dennis Hopper) is the first to fall victim to the monster’s blood-sucking cravings. Rather than do the right thing and destroy the creature, Anders (a solid portrayal of how scientists gum up the works) insists they have to keep the Queen alive—they resort to feeding it blood plasma on the return trip. However, when the plasma supply runs out, Anders pays the price when the creature goes looking for fresh blood. With only Allen and Laura (whose chaste romantic relationship seems almost an afterthought, which is quite surprising as this picture was filmed in the swingin’ 60s, and is an A.I.P. picture as well), the alien female is tied up, but eventually escapes and attacks Allen. It’s Laura to the rescue, who, during a mini-second’s struggle with the creature, manages to scratch its shoulder. The Queen screams in pain, rushes off to another part of the ship, and is soon found dead, the victim of some classic Sci-fi lingo about alien hemophiliacs coming to earth to find an endless supply of new blood.

The survivors arrive on earth only to discover that the green bloodsucker has laid eggs. Welcoming scientists quickly confiscate the specimens for study, and the finale prepares us for what could possibly be *Queen Of Blood II*. Sadly, sequels in the Corman factory were almost nonexistent in the sixties, so the perfect back door never swung open.





In Curtis Harrington's hands, *Queen Of Blood* was not a knuckleheaded film at all, but rather a predictable plot done up with no shortage of smart moments. Harrington had a real handle on the actors, who, in various stages of their careers, were guided to stalwart performances of obvious clichés and a level of earnestness that made even the more lead-footed moments early on tolerable. His script, typical of Corman releases of the period, is largely devoid of character development and any semblance of backstory, but pushes the right motivational buttons just enough to keep the story moving and makes for few sluggish moments.

The director's take on the alien creature is spot on. She is attractive enough to elicit damp dreams from space cadets in the audience, but an emphasis on close shots of the alien's eyes and face when prowling and feeding, are downright creepy in a low-key/arty take on terror.

There are a few amusing moments throughout the film. The clunky space outfits, coming close to looking like workout suits are quaint. The helmets appear spot on for the period, if a bit dated now. *Queen Of Blood* takes a stab at predicting the future by postulating that, in 1990, we have already established a base on the moon—a leap of faith in 1966 that ultimately missed the mark. Budgetary considerations also make for a laugh or two when an all important piece of spaceship gear turns out to be an ancient reel-to-reel tape machine, and when, in one sequence, a blackboard is marched out as state of the art lab equipment.

MGM Entertainment's widescreen made-on-demand DVD-R edition opens things up a bit, while avoiding, at least to these bloodshot eyes, any fuzz or blur around the edges. The crisp look of this edition is actually quite good and clean, adding depth to the close-ups and amping up the fear factor when the creature is out to lunch.

There are several reasons to own *Queen Of Blood* rather than rent it. Basil Rathbone in the later stages of his illustrious career, gives a solid performance in a situation that would appear to be beneath him. Dennis Hopper shines in what was one of his last "dues paying" gigs before he got caught up in the life and went all *Easy Rider* on us. And lest we forget Mr. Monster himself, Forrest J Ackerman, is all spit and polish as Dr. Farraday's assistant.

But at the end of the day, Florence Marly as the creature, all green, quiet, and deadly, is what lingers in the memory, providing some legitimately creepy moments in a flawed but artistic piece of horror on the cheap.

Marc Shapiro

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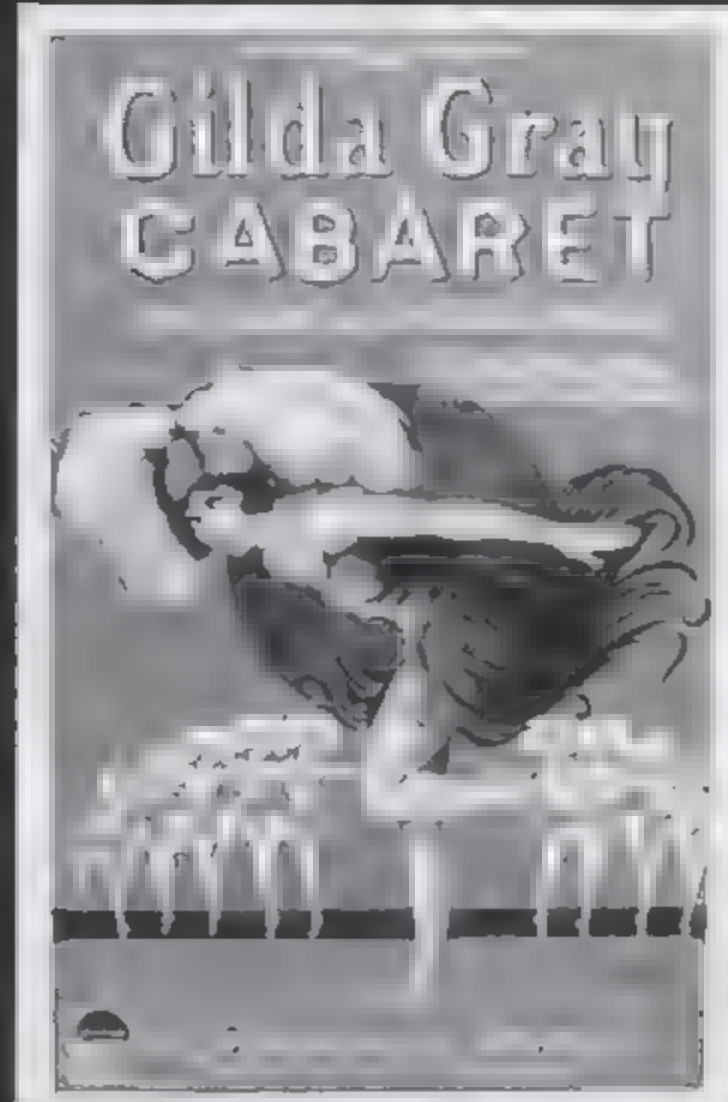
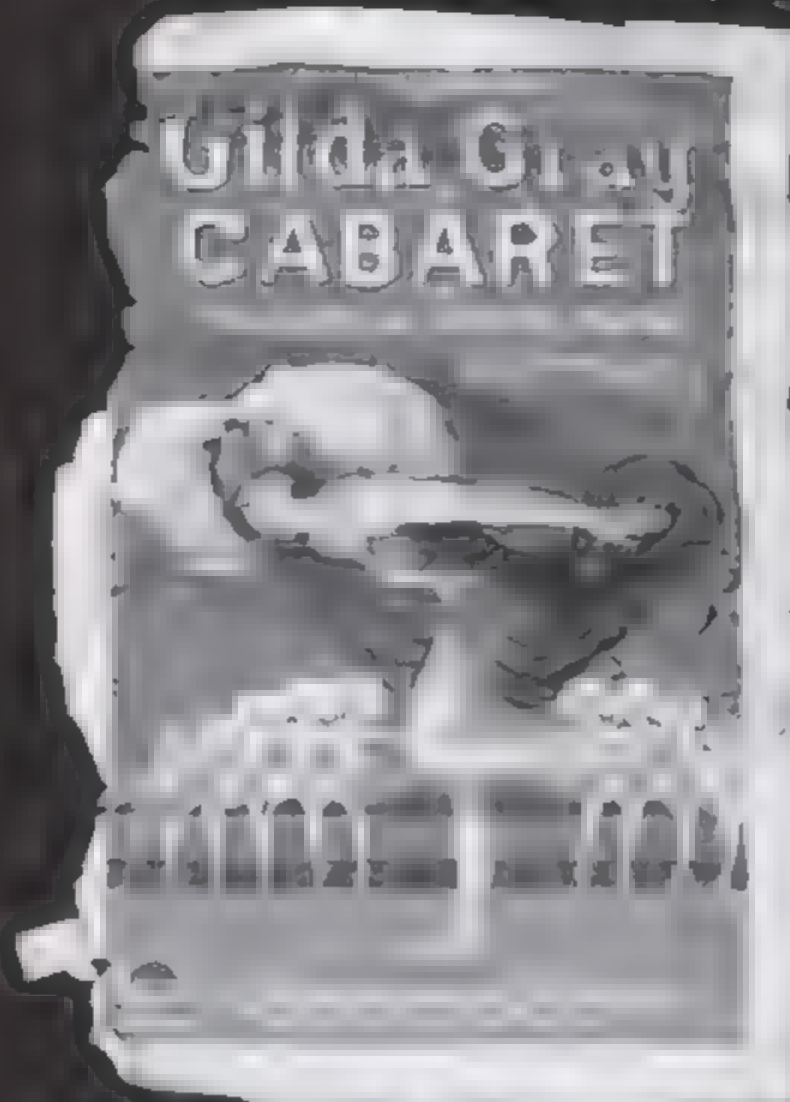
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**DR. BLACK AND MR. HYDE**  
**35th ANNIVERSARY EDITION**  
 Directed by William Crain  
 (1976) VCI Entertainment DVD

When it comes to bad acting, nobody beats Blaxploitation star Bernie Casey. Most actors are bad in one specific way but Casey's badness carries a surprising verisimilitude. Sometimes he treats his roles with a detached bemusement, other times he looks bored and angry—almost as if standing in front of a camera is taking him away from the things, I imagine, he usually does in his private life—such as seducing the wife of a ruthless mob boss, or knocking a horse out with one punch. There are even times when he's so painfully earnest in his attempts to act, that you just want to hug him, kiss him on the forehead and softly ask him to stop please stop.

It's rare for any film to feature Casey's unique brand of versatility. Usually we either get the Casey who not-so-slyly winks at the audience, or the Casey that emotes way too hard, or the Casey that's phoning it in, in but rarely do we get all three. Happily, the many faces of Casey are on display in *Dr. Black and Mr. Hyde*, and generally keep the film from turning into an unwatchable slog, even though it comes dangerously close at times.

In *Dr. Black and Mr. Hyde*, Casey plays Dr. Henry Pride (nee Black), a wealthy (but caring) scientist who spends a great amount of time volunteering at the Free Clinic and Thrift Shop in South Central LA. I'd like to add that The Free Clinic and Gift Shop appears to be an actual location, and if I wasn't so sure that it no longer exists, I would gladly volunteer to be stabbed in the face on the mean streets of Watts, just to catch a glimpse of this place in person. At any rate, Henry's tireless efforts don't end at mere charitable work, he's also developing a formula that can regenerate dying liver cells. But like one of those happy scientific accidents that turned an industrial rubber into Silly Putty and caused one man's chocolate to get on another man's peanut butter, Henry's formula doesn't repair the liver as much as it transforms its patients into hulking albinos that strangle prostitutes. What a merry mix-up! Of course, Henry only notices this little side effect when he tests it on himself, and starts taking out his long pent-up aggressions on surprisingly attractive hookers who love doing blow, or guys named Silky, who also love to do blow. Eventually, the formula reduces Henry to a feral, snarling state, and in a final scene that inexplicably pays homage to *King Kong*, Henry abducts a kindly hooker and proceeds to climb the Watts Tower as police open fire on his pasty body. Ah, yes, twas, beauty who blah, blah, etc. Let's move on.

Cinematically speaking, there's nothing worse than a director who bungles a sure-fire premise and William Crain (who also gave us 1972's *Blacula*), really drops the ball here. *Dr. Black* could have been a crazed, balls-to-the-wall exercise in kitschy insanity, but instead it's mostly an inert time-killer. The main problem lies in the fact that the albino Mr. Hyde (who bears an amusing resemblance to John C. Reilly) isn't given enough screen time. The film only ever comes to life when we watch Hyde toss people through the windows of cool old record shops, or running down pimps with his Rolls Royce (it should be noted that during this scene, the pimp pulls a switchblade on the Rolls Royce as it barrels towards him. I still can't make up my mind if that was supposed to be funny or not). But the moment Hyde wanders away from the camera, the film stops dead in its tracks. Still, in an attempt to hide the fact that nothing is happening on screen, Crain piles on pointless subplot after pointless subplot, and none of these digressions pay off in an interesting way or at all—the subplots simply die with the characters. *Dr. Black and Mr. Hyde* is defiant in its ineptitude. This film is violently dull, thoroughly un-scary, and actually has the guts to screw Robert Lewis Stevenson out of an on-screen credit. Yet, I will give recognition to *Dr. Black and Mr. Hyde* for its unnerving depiction of the 70s as an era in which the word "fag" was casually tossed around without a second thought, blow was apparently compulsory, and albinos ruled the night with a pale fist. VCI's DVD contains no extras whatsoever, which is a bit of a disappointment, considering the film's trailer is just as (if not more) entertaining than the film itself!

Mike Sullivan



**BIRDEMIC**  
**SHOCK AND TERROR**  
 Directed by James Nguyen  
 (2010) Severin Films Blu-ray/DVD

Already notorious as a cult classic movie, *Birdemic: Shock and Terror* has audiences rolling in the aisles at the local repertory house. The work of Korean auteur James Nguyen, who goes under the copyrighted moniker of the master of the "romantic thriller," *Birdemic* updates Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) for the Facebook Generation with unintentionally hilarious results.

Silicon Valley drones Rod (Alan Bagh) and Nathalie (Whitney Moore) take an impromptu vacation along the Northern Californian coast when birds start attacking the human populace. Finding their way to safer ground in a van, they pick up a freshly orphaned brother and sister and try to navigate their way through the wilderness under siege from avian attacks.

In the manner of the late, great John S. Rad of *Dangerous Men* (2005) fame (see *Scream* #12 for the gruesome details), and Tommy Wiseau of *The Room* (2003), Nguyen attempts to fashion a picture in the Grand American Tradition—with interesting results.

Where does one begin? Classic "bad" films tend to overreach, and *Birdemic* deserves kudos for trying to emulate Hitchcock's most technically complex project on a purported \$10,000 budget. The main attack scene, as shared in the trailer and chief print advertisement consists of repeated or "cloned" computer images of the same birds circling over a besieged town, many crashing to the ground to burst into flames in the manner of gasoline-filled World War II Kamikaze pilots. The visual calls to mind a Dadaist collage, punk rock flier or the world's worst video game. There have been Internet grumblings that the special effects crew on this film went unpaid for their efforts, and this writer wouldn't have paid for them either. Even worse is the scene where the birds hover menacingly at the hotel the protagonists are taking cover in. Each hotel window has three birds assigned to it, their wings flapping s-l-o-w-l-y as the same screeching sound is played over and over again ad infinitum. Such scenes suggest that the crew knew beforehand they would go uncompensated for their work and set out to deliberately sabotage the project.

Director Nguyen also totally miscalculates Hitchcock's slow-burn approach. While *The Birds* takes its time before the first real attack scene, Hitchcock is mindful to foreshadow these later scenes by ratcheting up the tension and the dread early on. Scenes such as Tippi Hedren being attacked by a seagull as she rows to shore, or another seagull crashing into a door in order to break up a long scene of extraneous dialogue all add up to this cumulative effect. In *Birdemic*, the main characters go about their jobs as telemarketers—THE most boring job in the world to film imaginable, as it consists of little more than sitting at a desk and making cold calls to prospective clients a full half hour before the winged avengers show up.

One scene in *Birdemic* is chilling in spite of, or more than likely because of its ineptitude. The heroes find the orphaned children by the side of the road as the birds pick the bodies of their parents clean. Taking them into their van and distracting the children with toys, the bodies of their parents remain stubbornly in range of the vehicle's rearview mirror as the kids play happily in the backseat!

*Birdemic* does share a few things in common with M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening* (2008). As in that later multi-million dollar dud, after it is established that the plants are giving off toxins that drive human beings to suicide, Mark Wahlberg and his friends find ample excuses to walk around outside. The people in *Birdemic* likewise seize the opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors with hikes in the mountains and open-air picnics. Staying barricaded in a shelter waiting for the attacks to subside in the manner of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) held little interest for Nguyen, apparently.

Surprisingly, *Birdemic* is not Nguyen's first film. *Julie and Jack* (2003) about a love affair between two Silicon Valley geeks is available on Netflix. *Julie and Jack* also features a harried cameo from *The Birds'* Tippi Hedren (that is likewise quoted off a TV screen in *Birdemic*). In this earlier film, the fact that Julie has been dead long before the events in the film take place, and that the couple's courtship is nothing more than a computer simulacrum is actually rather clever and original. However *Julie and Jack* is ultimately undone by acres and acres of abjectly lousy acting, writing, photography, sound recording and editing—just like *Birdemic*.

The Severin DVD and Blu-Ray disc for *Birdemic* comes packed with extras. We get two commentary tracks (one with director Nguyen, another with actors Alan Bagh and Whitney Moore); deleted scenes; a *Birdemic* experience tour featurette; James Nguyen on the cable access show *Movie Close Up*; theatrical teasers and trailers; and, an electronic press kit.

*Scream* editor Darryl Mayeski has suggested that the ultimate extra for this feature would be an audio commentary by James Nguyen for Tommy Wiseau's *The Room*, while Wiseau does an audio commentary for Nguyen's *Birdemic*. Just imagine—Nguyen would actually wax eloquently over Wiseau's *The Room* as it truly is a "romantic thriller"—albeit a highly skewed one, while Wiseau would quickly lose interest in *Birdemic* to talk about *The Room* instead. We can dream.

Greg Goodsell



## THE MIND OF MR. SOAMES

Directed by Alan Cooke  
(1969) Sony Archive Made on Demand (DVD-R)

A top-flight cast and themes which remain provocative and relevant to this very day highlight one of the best non-anthology features from Amicus Studios (not to mention the only theatrical venture for prolific television director Alan Cooke).

John Soames is a fully-grown thirty-year-old man (as was star Terence Stamp at the time of filming), but he's been in a coma since birth. Only now might an experimental neurological technique awaken him—and the world is watching. The experiment is, of course, a success, and now Mr. Soames is faced with the task of growing out of his infantile state. Representing opposing schools of parenting are Dr. Maitland (Nigel Davenport), who relies on strictly scheduled lessons and discipline; and Dr. Michael Bergen (Robert Vaughn), who stresses the importance of indulgent nurturing, exploration and discovery. Personalities inevitably clash, and the man-child eventually finds his own unsupervised way into the world at large.

*The Mind of Mr. Soames* deliberately raises more questions than it answers. Soames may have thirty years of catching up to do, but the film covers only the early stages of his upbringing—far too little for one to render a clear decision as to which, if either, “parent” had the superior approach. Meanwhile, all such issues are compromised by the eager, ever-present media: the film may be seen to uncomfortably predict the current “reality” television rage and the debate of celebrity privacy vs. paparazzi profits, but the criticism of British tabloid journalism of the day wasn't exaggerated even in 1969. Particularly telling is a newspaper headline that appears once Soames makes his escape—the public is invited to wonder “Can This Baby KILL?”

The lack of traditional thrills, exploitation elements and a pat resolution may stir feelings of impatience among some lured by the Amicus name, but any of the above would have severely compromised the film. The story is quite thoughtful and intelligent as it is (and we can be grateful that it didn't take the easy way out and turn into a courtroom drama), but of course it's Terence Stamp who renders it fascinating with a performance every bit up to the bar set by Cliff Robertson in his Oscar-winning turn in the previous year's *Charly* (which explored extremely similar moral/ethical dilemmas in a comparable science-fiction context). Seasoned professionals Davenport and Vaughn anchor him every step of the way as the doctors at odds: one gruff, one gentle, but neither villainous nor completely innocent. The elements seamlessly coalesce into a thoroughly satisfying drama.

While the film's television version was uncut, it was harshly cropped from its original widescreen dimensions: fans are sure to appreciate the MOD (made on demand) DVD-R available exclusively from the Sony Archive, bereft of extras though it may be—it's a smooth, attractive transfer that hasn't been seen this way in roughly forty years.

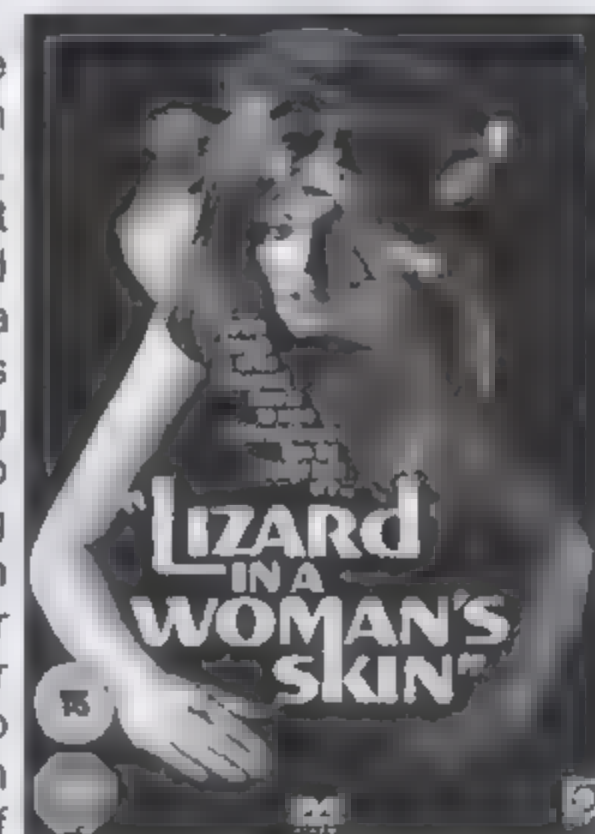
Shane M. Dallmann



## A LIZARD IN A WOMAN'S SKIN

[Una lucertola con la pelle di donna]  
Directed by Lucio Fulci  
(1971) Optimum Releasing Region 2 import

This early psychosexual thriller from Lucio Fulci hints at the specialized gore he'd later become famous for, most notably during a notorious sequence in which dogs are mutilated in the name of senseless experimentation. (Orchestrated by special effects guru Carlo Rambaldi, a court case almost put Fulci in jail after it was thought to be the real deal.) The uncomplicated story involves Carol Hammond (Florinda Bolkan, *Don't Torture a Duckling*), a frazzled but wealthy heroine who experiences memorably-depicted LSD trips involving strange psychotropic visions and wickedly erotic orgies involving her neighbor, Julia Durel (Anita Strindberg). Carol wakes up one morning to the possibility of murdering her, though she can't recall the specifics. Aiding in Carol's quest for innocence is authority figure Frank Hammond (Jean Sorel, from Bunuel's *Belle de jour* and Umberto Lenzi's not dissimilar *Paranoia*), though the duo's friendship/burgeoning companionship makes for the least interesting aspect of this psychedelic split-screen gem. Amping up the sexuality is frequently nude Strindberg, a hedonist who dabbles in lesbianism and is quite fetching to watch. Once she exits the picture, much of the momentum (and fun) is lost. Ennio Morricone, surely hired on the basis of his work for Dario Argento's similarly-themed ‘Animal’ trilogy, provides an adequate score, though hardly one of his best in the thriller genre. Though there are multiple extant versions of *Lizard* (with the brief edits mostly involving the sundry dream sequences and erotic content), Optimum's new DVD only contains a 99 minute cut with the choice of subtitles or English dubbing. Looking pristine in 16x9, the film has never looked better on home video, though it would be nice to have a definitive version with the shorter cuts assembled in one package alongside the 20m documentary that appeared on the earlier Shriekshow release. Optimum does provide a theatrical trailer, but that's about it. With his best work to follow within the next decade, Fulci would even prove that he had better *gialli* in him—with the following year's *Don't Torture a Duckling*.



Aaron Graham

## CRUSTACEAN

Directed by L. J. Dopp  
(2009) Mars Hills Prods. DVD

A two-bit circus sideshow rolls into a hick Alabama town, populated solely by two families. The outfit is distinctly bereft of thrills and wonder. The bearded fat lady is merely a man in drag, and the pinheaded Siamese twins aren't twins, connected only by their abject failure to convince anyone. Adding insult to injury, the sideshow's gypsy fortune teller tells elderly science-fiction author George Clayton Johnson, of “Logan's Run” fame that “I see longevity in your lifeline — and someday, you'll be a famous writer.” The only really authentic freak of nature on display appears to be Lobster Baby (Zenius Muleckis), and even his act as a growling mutant with oven-mitt lobster claws appears to be an act, a cover for his true personality as a suave and debonair monster-about-town.

The town's two families—one, the Stains, an expectedly inbred trailer trash clan, and the Andersons, a snobbish, middle-class brood both feud and squabble as a series of gory murders erupt all around them. As the majority of the victims have their heads snipped off as if by an outsized, reptilian claw, blame naturally falls on our misunderstood Lobster Baby. People are killed, the young fall in love, fame is found, fortunes are made — and the surviving members of this squalid morality tale are dragged back to the Stains' abandoned trailer for startling revelations enacted in front of Reality TV cameras.

Fans of the unusual, in search of edgy thrills or heartfelt nonsense are frequently drawn to 99-seat equity waiver theaters found in major metropolitan centers. In my many travels to Hollywood, I have been astounded and entertained by musical renditions of *The Poseidon Adventure*, *Spider Baby* and odd, supernatural stories starring such film favorites as Karen Black. When such productions are good, they're very, very good and when they're bad — they're even better. You're sure be the envy of your friends when you tell them you saw a stage adaptation of *Robot Monster* with an all-black cast with tap-dancing musical numbers and that you were one of four audience members, the other three including her mother and two small children.

*Crustacean* has all the joyous energy of the best a 99-seat equity waiver theater production has to offer. The film hits all its marks and is frequently successful at being genuinely funny. All the actors tackle their roles with enthusiasm, and the production has a cheerfully tacky appeal. There is gore of the strawberry-punch-pouring-out-of-a-garden-hose variety, there are flashes of nudity far too nice and not at all naughty and everyone seems to be having a wonderful time. References to other trash touchstones such as *Motel Hell*, *Pink Flamingos* and director Edward D. Wood Jr. go whizzing past the viewer's eyes. It's almost as if Troma Films finally got the delicate balance between crass trash and knowing sophistication it repeatedly strives for.

Adding a toe-tapping selection of original songs and some pointed social commentary, *Crustacean* is an across-the-boards crowd pleaser. The film's “message,” that contemporary American life has devolved into a circus sideshow courtesy of 500-plus cable TV channels, all desperate for content may be a deeply serious one. But you'll be too busy rolling off the couch laughing.

Greg Goodrell





## QUIET DAYS IN CLICHY

Directed by Jens Jørgen Thorsen  
(1970) Blue Underground Blu-ray

Henry Miller continues to be a controversial author decades after his passing; his erotically charged novel *Tropic of Cancer* is a classic of censored literature. Perhaps due to the very outrage his work can still stir up in certain circles, Hollywood has been reluctant to seriously turn his unique vision of oversexed masculinity within Parisian bohemia into box office dollars. The closest attempts we have are Philip Kaufman's *Henry & June*, which has the distinct honor of being the first NC-17 picture (which didn't help much at the box office unfortunately) and a *Cancer* adaptation back in 1970, which is largely forgotten today.

However back in 1970, Danish filmmaker Jens Jørgen Thorsen crafted his own adaptation of Miller's banned memoir, *Quiet Days in Clichy*, starring non-professionals, with a strangely fitting score by Country Joe McDonald. Immediately decried as pornography and internationally banned, *Clichy* developed a cult reputation amongst those young enough to explore the sexual revolution. Starring Paul Valjean as Joey, an American expatriate writer and Wayne Rodda as Carl, Joey's Parisian roommate and friend, the pair spend their days living hand to mouth and having sex with as many beautiful women as possible. To call this film pornography by today's standards would be overreacting, but there are plenty of full-frontal nudity and graphic sex scenes in the film that would make the MPAA cringe. There really is no beginning, middle, or end to the proceedings, just an endless progression of women the duo run through.

Don't expect any life-changing epiphanies or character arcs, these two men are what they are, and that's what is so fun to watch. The film now is interesting to view as more historical document than timeless classic. In terms of filmmaking itself, the frequent stylistic references to the French New Wave—be they jump cuts, handheld, cinema verité-like camerawork, or even other inventive touches like the frequent thought bubbles popping up on-screen—hearken back to a specific time and culture different than the one we occupy now. Country Joe's score acts as Greek chorus as well, relating events taking place before our eyes and acting as a running commentary track at times.

Then there is the matter of Miller himself, since Joey is clearly cast as Henry's onscreen persona (down to the glasses and bald head). Joey becomes the intellectual and near emotional heart of the film, as he philosophizes over both the supposed wretchedness of females at times and his love for them—even if he is outwitted frequently by them. This is perfectly illustrated early on after Joey's first tryst with Nys, a beautiful brunette he compares to a Renoir painting. After a sensuous session of copulating (leaving fairly little to the imagination), Nys meekly asks him for some money to help out. Being the carefree soul he is (besides all the times he utters out profanities), Joey graciously gives her every franc in his possession.

Only after another tiring session and her departure does he realize his error in paying Nys, when his stomach begins grumbling. Scouring the streets of Paris for an opportunity to eat sans money, he thinks back in disgust to his gullibility. Imagining Nys devouring a wonderful lunch in the countryside with some anonymous lover, while he runs the nighttime Parisian streets seething, Joey is angered by her treachery, but bemused by his foolishness. In a way, this typifies the misogynistic tendency in the film to break women down and reduce them to purely sexual beings, while underscoring Man's own foolishness and caring for them.

Joey and Carl love women but do not know how to truly express that within their solipsistic Bohemianism, so they cast them as the enemy to be enjoyed, rather than respected as equals. Perhaps they fear the loss of freedom that women have so often been accused of representing; however, the females recognize these two men as a pair of arrogant louts, who can be turned out as long as they offer up some carnal pleasure in exchange. In the end, everyone cons each other but has fun while doing it. While it is not the most polished film, *Quiet Days in Clichy* does adequately tap into Miller's literary worldview, espousing the joy within living freely and indulging vice as social rebellion.

Paul Valjean's role as Joey is able to express a certain degree of emotional depth within the writer without becoming bogged down by pensiveness. Wayne Rodda's portrayal as Carl is simply dreadful on all levels, and I will leave it at that. As for the women themselves, they come in all sizes and temperaments, all beautiful and mysterious. A conversation with Miller's longtime American publisher Barney Rosset only adds to the film's background, by investigating the author himself. *Quiet Days in Clichy* is certainly made for literary fans and those with a penchant for erotic, not pornographic, cinema. It is rough and dated but espouses a philosophy and energy that many artists today do not stand up as vehemently for as Miller and Thorsen did in their time.

Todd Komrad



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# ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTERS (1957) / WAR OF THE SATELLITES (1958) / NOT OF THIS EARTH (1957)

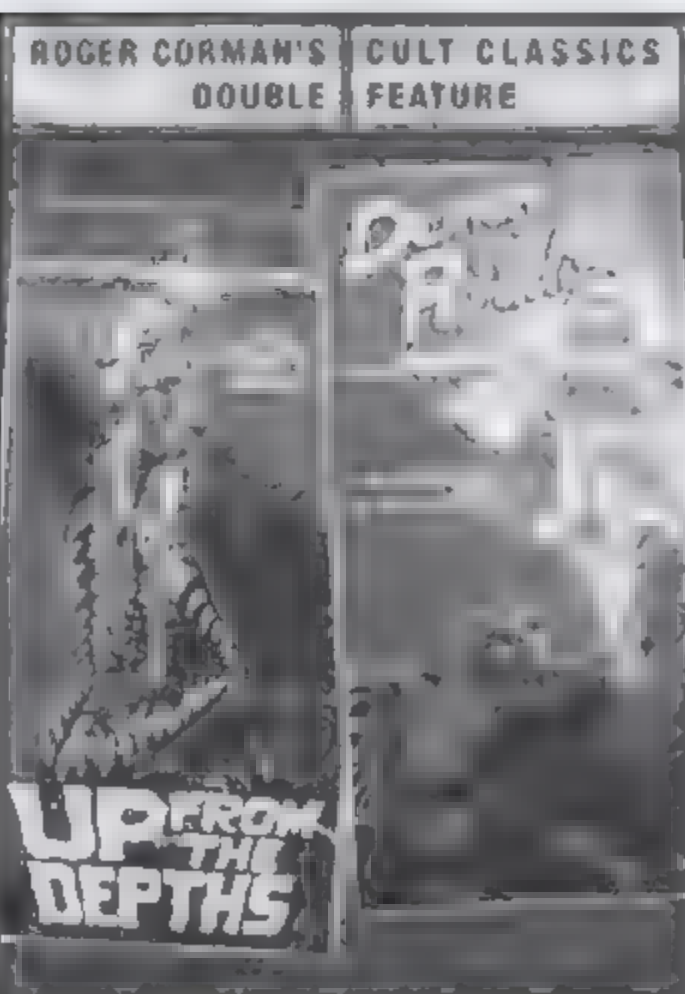
Directed by Roger Corman  
Shout! Factory DVD

If there's a triple-bill to serve as a prime example of the economy and expertise of Roger Corman's early directorial work, it's this 2-disc set. In the span of Corman's legendary career, each film was produced a couple of years behind the sumptuous bigger-budget Poe pictures. Though all three are in black-and-white, it's still not quite accurate to compare them to *Little Shop of Horrors* or *A Bucket of Blood*, a period skewered further into black comedy territory by the pen of Charles B. Griffith. Of course, *Crab Monsters* and *Not of This Earth* also come from Griffith's warped mind, but they're scaled back by more predictable and less risk-taking sci-fi scenarios. *Crab Monsters* stars future *Gilligan's Island* professor, Russell Johnson (also from Corman's *Rock All Night*) and Richard Garland as the alpha-males in control of a second expedition to a mysterious island; unbeknownst to them, the titular odd-looking creatures are running amok (Look for Griffith as the first on-screen victim, simultaneously drowning while being chomped on by one of the goofy, wide-eyed monsters.) Pretty Pamela Duncan offers up the only female support, while Mel Welles provides estimable comic relief as only he can. Sensational music by Ronald Stein, and a running time of just over 60 minutes makes *Crab Monsters* an enjoyable romp.

*Not of This Earth* may be the only legitimately "great" film of the set, slyly involving the novel concept of an alien being collecting blood from humans to ensure the populace of his planet survives. Familiar faces Dick Miller (as a vacuum cleaner salesman, wickedly written to perfection by Griffith) and Jonathan Haze turn up, as does Beverly Garland. If there's a picture in the set to be uttered in the same breath as *Little Shop of Horrors* or *Blood*, it's this one. *War of the Satellites*, not written by Griffith, is unsurprisingly the weakest effort, though I'm thankful it's included for completist's sake. A sober-minded alien attack picture, the film's most notable for featuring Corman himself in a rather sizable role. Extras on Shout!'s 2-disc set include the syndication padding provided in the early 1960s for *Crab Monsters* and *Not of This Earth*, and a fairly comprehensive trailer reel showcasing only the films in which Corman serves as director. It's a terrific way to witness the evolution of a career before he would change direction and form New World Pictures.

Aaron Graham

# UP FROM THE DEPTHS/DEMON OF PARADISE Directed by Charles B. Griffith (1979) / Cirio H. Santiago (1987) Shout! Factory DVD



This admittedly bizarre pairing of Filipino-tinged aquatic horror pictures most excitingly features an acceptable transfer of a Charles B. Griffith-directed oddity previous relegated to shoddy home video treatment. The lesser-half of this double-bill is clearly Santiago's mid-80s cheapie *Demon of Paradise*, most notable for its shameless *Jaws* rip-off poster art. As Griffith once described in an interview with myself, "I was making an action picture, but The Philippines people were all so depressed, and [they] had made this goofy-looking fish with bug eyes. I told them that we'll make it a comedy, and their eyes lit up! So I sent back a comedy on one plane, and I arrived on the next one. By the time I arrived, Roger had already cut 75 minutes out." Standing firm at 75 minutes, *Up From The Depths* isn't as terrible as Griffith lets on, and a few of his subversive humoristic touches are reflected in the finished cut. Sam Bottoms is a worthwhile lead for such a bankrupt premise (remember this came after *Piranha*), attempting to rid the community of the mysterious shark-like creature subsisting on the locals and tourists alike. Dynamite's the culprit in *Demon of Paradise*, awaking reptilian creatures resting

undisturbed at the bottom of the ocean. The only element that differentiates this late *Jaws* knock-off from its 70s New World brethren are the garish 80s clothing—making it appear more as a *Jaws: The Revenge* clone than anything else. Extras are minimal, save for a brief making-of for *Depths*, with none of the principals involved (both Bottoms and Griffith have passed away in the last few years). Trailers for similar New World fare are included, with a Grindhouse Experience that maintains the standard-issue 70s coming attractions and Now Playing intros.

Aaron Graham

# MONAMOUR

Directed by Tinto Brass  
(2006) Cult Epics DVD



Tinto Brass could be best described as the Italian Russ Meyer. Both Brass and Meyer worshipped the female form on film, and he does not disappoint on his latest film, *Monamour*, now on DVD courtesy of his American distributor Cult Epics. Brass has long been a fixture within the seamier side of Italian cinema, best known for being the original director on *Caligula* (before Bob Guccione took over), and despite being known best now for his softcore porn, 'erotic' adaptations of literary works such as *The Key*, *Fanny Hill*, and *The Mistress of the Inn*, he also helmed a number of mainstream films beforehand such as *The Howl* and *Yankee*.

Although Brass can be linked to Meyer, he could just as well be compared to as Bernardo Bertolucci's pervy cousin. Both filmmakers are unafraid to tackle erotic subject matter in a frank manner—whereas Bertolucci will plumb the psychological depths of individuals exploring their sexuality (i.e. *Last Tango in Paris*, *The Dreamers*, *Luna*), Tinto Brass is more keen on playing up the ribaldry within his tales. They are less *Last Tango* and more *Emmanuelle*, but thankfully better shot and composed. *Monamour* is Brass' latest film (released in 2006) featuring the lovely and buxom Anna Jimskaia as Marta, a beautiful but unfulfilled Milanese wife who after being married six months to her love Dario (Max Parodi), has watched their sexual chemistry rapidly diminish. This is perfectly illustrated by the opening sequence in which Marta is in the throw of passion straddling her man, who after finishing himself off a bit too early leaves a look of disappointment and disgust on his wife's face.

Her disappointment and inner thoughts are all recorded in her secret diary, read aloud in voice over to provide the audience a window into her mind. The scene does showcase Marta's assets quite well though, surrounded by reproduction frescoes of naked men and women. While the couple stays in Mantua for an important book fair that Dario (a literary publisher) must attend, Marta's frustration hits the wall. Her advances and complaints playfully ignored by him, it isn't until she meets Parisian comic book artist Leon (Riccardo Marino). Mysterious and handsome, Leon knows exactly what he wants when he follows her inside of a historic villa, and proceeds to passionate kiss and grope her delicious bits before being rudely interrupted by a school class.

Feeling both violated and exhilarated, Marta is distraught over what to do until she accepts her friend Sylvia's (Nela Lucic) advice to indulge herself, and tell Dario all about the dirty deed. Since he is uncaring over her current lack of orgasms as is, perhaps a bit of jealousy is what he needs to start paying attention again. Meanwhile, Dario stumbles upon the diary and begins piecing together the full depth of his wife's unhappiness, as well as recognizing his own sexual failings. Marta though dives headlong into a lustful affair with her Parisian gigolo, leading to one sequence after another of bared breasts, loud moaning, giant rubber penises, and bare asses, all of which are gloriously filmed and lit by Brass.

As the married couple's relationship seemingly disintegrates, Brass explores cuckoldry as an aphrodisiac. It's an idea that may be odd and perhaps troublesome to many people, but it is a real behavior pattern that couples explore in reality. To Brass' credit, most other filmmakers would probably depict the negative consequences of open relationships and cuckolding one's spouse, but Tinto has fun with it. Behind the sometimes cheesy, Euro-trashy visuals, lies a celebration of sex itself; the frequent buttocks-obsessed close-ups; melodramatic sex scenes; and, questionable dialogue aside, *Monamour* depicts the rebirth of a couple through betrayal rather than unity. An intriguing idea, despite one's opinion of the execution.

Todd Konrad



## SHOCK CORRIDOR

Directed by Sam Fuller

(1963) Criterion Collection Blu-Ray/DVD



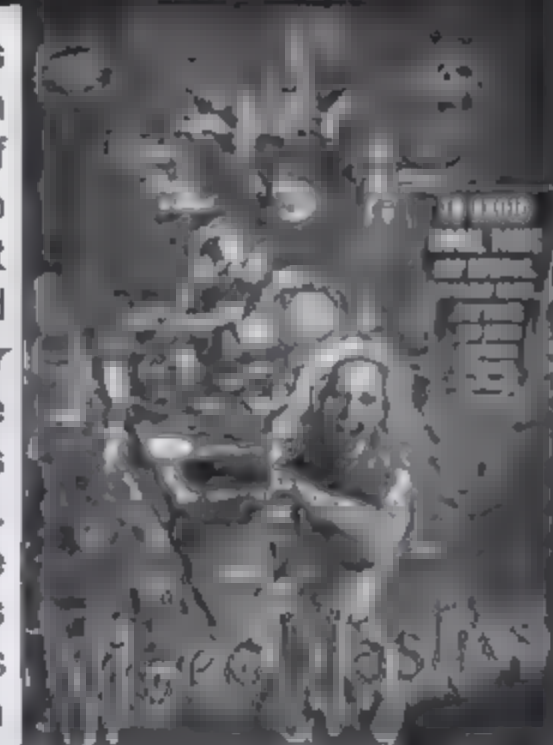
Through the pulp-infused prism of former crime reporter novelist, infantryman and scriptwriter Samuel Michael Fuller emerges this sensationalistic attack on the hypocrisies of America. Writ large with bombastic tabloid candor *Shock Corridor* is given an extra dose of woozy poetry for its central metaphoric setting: quite succinctly, American society-as-mental-institution. Johnny Barrett (Peter Breck) is a swaggering Daily Globe journalist who hits upon a cockamamie scheme: commit himself to a mental ward in order to investigate a murder from the inside-out. Aiming for a Pulitzer, it may cost him his sanity. A stellar example of ripe post-film noir sensibilities, *Shock Corridor* packs a wallop via its wall-to-wall colorful characters. There's Johnny's stripper girlfriend (played by Constance Towers, so memorable as Fuller's reformed prostitute not afraid of physical violence in the director's companion piece, *The Naked Kiss*, also being re-released by Criterion), who most memorably appears to Johnny in a hallucinogenic nightmare. Larry Tucker (later to be Paul Mazursky's first writing partner) is unforgettable as the mammoth and bearded Pagliacci, an inmate who constantly sings "The Marriage of Figaro" out of tune. James Best (best known as Roscoe P. Coltrane on *The Dukes of Hazzard*) and Gene Evans (from Fuller's immortal *The Steel Helmet*) add their own inimitable presences for support. A perennial favorite of the Movie Brats (De Palma, Scorsese), *Shock Corridor* remains an under-the-radar caterwaul of potentially expressive melodrama that's stood the test of time, the best representation of all of Fuller's main concerns. Remastered for Blu-ray with newly commissioned art by comic book artist Daniel Clowes and excerpts from Fuller's autobiography *A Third Face*, Criterion has also (thankfully) added some archival interviews with Fuller, and a new one-on-one with co-star Towers. Even more exciting in this wealth of extras is that it contains Adam Simon's 1996 *The Typewriter, The Rifle & The Movie Camera*. Featuring Quentin Tarantino, Martin Scorsese, Jim Jarmusch, Tim Robbins and, most importantly, Fuller himself, the doc showcases what a bold dynamo Fuller was in person. And that's not to mention the perfect extension of his films: gregarious, invigorating, and brimming with a wild-eyed ferociousness the likes of which won't pass this way again.

Aaron Graham

## VIDEO NASTIES: THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

W/D: Jake West

(2010) Nucleus Region 2 DVD (PAL)



Those of us who lived through the late 80s and the first half of the 1990s may remember this era as a particularly troublesome time for fans of "extreme" horror and action films. Blockbuster Video had begun its monolithic takeover of the rental market and declared "unrated" special editions of R-rated theatrical features (starting with *Hellbound: Hellraiser 2*) as inappropriate for their inventory: they also made headlines by declaring Martin Scorsese's controversial *The Last Temptation of Christ* off-limits. Senators Bob Dole and Joe Lieberman both made highly-publicized "Shame on Hollywood" speeches which held unfettered action and horror films responsible for real-life American violence (though Dole, who hadn't actually seen any of the films he specifically condemned, made special exceptions for the works of such Republican contributors as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tom Selleck and Bruce Willis). Religiously-motivated watchdog groups (such as Donald Wildmon's American Family Association) organized consumer boycotts against programs which failed to live up to their standards (including the syndicated *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*). The "suggestion" was always the same: if the entertainment industry didn't choose to regulate itself, self-appointed guardians would be only too happy to team up with members of Congress and do it for them. Eventually, the MPAA grudgingly created the NC-17 rating (to separate adult-oriented entertainment from actual pornography), but such films were still denied advertising space in major newspapers and forbidden space on Blockbuster's shelves. Major video labels such as Paramount chose not to release unrated alternatives of their "R" titles at all (Frank Henenlotter's *Brain Damage* sustained several cuts, while Scott Spiegel's *Intruder* was rendered incomprehensible), and even Troma settled for watered-down alternatives of their titles which supplied none of the outrageous material promised on the packaging (seek out the original rental cassettes of *Rabid Grannies* and *Redneck Zombies*). Not only that, but copies of the R-rated cutdowns of such acclaimed films as Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant* and David Cronenberg's *Crash* may still be available as evidence for those who might have thought that the resultant damage was limited to gory independent horror. In the pre-Internet age, fans were prepared to take for granted that both the gruesome thrills they sought and the overall intentions of their favorite directors would be

forever relegated to the underground world of fuzzy bootleg trading. We know now that this phenomenon wasn't permanent. Today, we can get our hands on pretty much anything we want to see—through legitimate channels, yet. But it's all too easy to take such freedom for granted. Had the legal controls they sought been obtained by the aforementioned guardians, the results may very well have resembled what actually took place in the England of the 1980s.

*Video Nasties: The Definitive Guide* is a 3-disc set which leads off with Jake West's comprehensive 71-minute documentary *Video Nasties: Moral Panic, Censorship and Videotape*. Utilizing a combination of archival news footage and modern commentary, West traces the pattern launched when the videocassette revolution (which originally bypassed the strict regulation imposed upon theatrical releases by the British Board of Film Censors) was seized upon by small, hungry distributors who made up for their lack of high-profile titles by renting and selling inexpensive horror/gore acquisitions and packaging them with the most sensationalistic artwork they could conceive. It didn't take long for such "video nasties" to draw moral/conservative ire—and as Mrs. Mary Whitehouse (the most outspoken of British right-wing figureheads who, like Bob Dole, never actually watched what she condemned) was close friends with then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the law quickly came down on video distributors, vendors and private retailers alike. Videocassettes were indiscriminately seized and burned, well-publicized raids became commonplace, and one unlucky merchant became a *cause célèbre* by actually serving prison time for dealing in freshly-banned video before the furor died down.

West's documentary explores not only the historical play-by-play but the various mindsets at work and the influential techniques deployed to turn the public mind against the allegedly damaging material with which they were being threatened. It's a foregone conclusion that titles ranging from *Snuff* to *Cannibal Holocaust* were passed off as the genuine article, but particularly telling is an archival sequence in which schoolchildren happily confess to watching completely nonexistent titles in an effort to seem 'cool' to their friends. More historical perspective is supplied by Graham Bright (who initiated the video censorship bill) in a contemporary interview; and the phenomenon is further explored by such historians as Kim Newman (*Nightmare Movies*), Argento expert Alan Jones, *Nightmare USA*'s Stephen Thrower, *Video Watchdog* contributor Brad Stevens, *Cinema Sexualis* author Dr. Patricia MacCormack (delightfully confounding expectations raised by her collegiate pedigree, fully ensconced in piercings and tattoos), and Martin Barker (one of the few voices of the time to take a stand against the tide of censorship). In addition to the documentary, Disc 1 includes 53 minutes worth of vintage VHS video logos, representing each and every company caught up in the controversy.

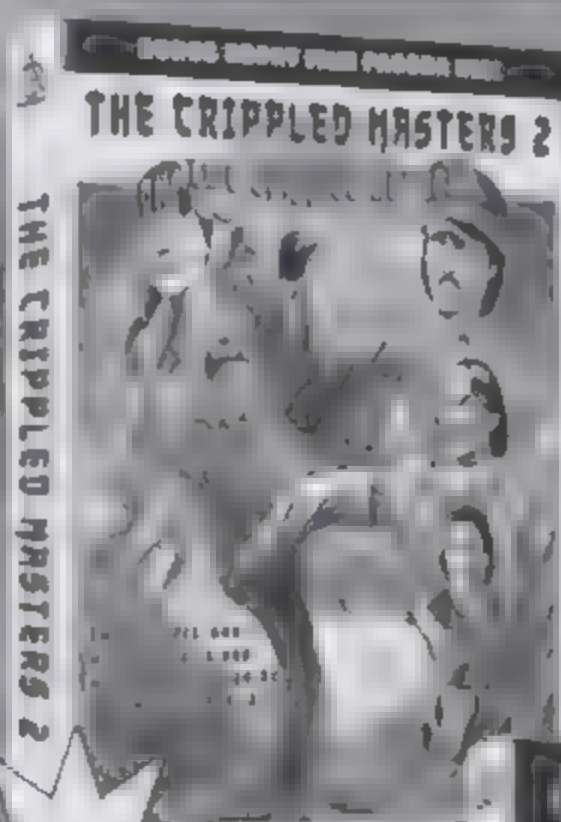
Though many, many films (appropriately in this context or not) were swept into the debate, the final list of officially banned "Video Nasties" boiled down to 72 titles (which included only one British film, the Udo Kier vehicle known variously as *Expose*, *Trauma*, and *The House on Straw Hill* among them), 33 of which were eventually dropped. Disc 2 takes us step by step through "The Final 39," as our documentary commentators (including actress/TV presenter Emily Booth) provide the stories behind each and every banned title en route to their theatrical and/or video trailers. Long, detailed appreciations of such crucial items as *Cannibal Holocaust*, (Ruggero Deodato himself appears to discuss both this film and his David Hess vehicle *House on the Edge of the Park*, *S.S. Experiment Camp*, *The Driller Killer* (the video artwork for these three were unquestionably the most notorious of the bunch), *The Last House on the Left*, *Fight for Your Life*, and *I Spit on Your Grave* share space with more perfunctory looks at such films ranging from Dario Argento's *Tenebrae* through the Paul Naschy vehicle *The Werewolf and the Yeti* (aka *Night of the Howling Beast*) which were almost certainly banned due to one specific shot apiece) and eventual bafflement as to how such comparatively innocuous pieces of trifle such as *Mardi Gras Massacre* and *Don't Go in the Woods* could possibly have qualified to begin with. Set at least four hours aside for the complete treatment—individual VHS artwork is supplied as a supplement.

Disc 3 gives the same loving treatment to "The Dropped 33" for over three hours. The release of Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* from the "banned" list is given due celebration, and we get to enjoy in-depth looks at Andrzej Zulawski's *Possession* and Lucio Fulci's *The Beyond* (among others) while wondering how anybody could have gotten worked up over *Pranks* (aka *The Dorm That Dripped Blood*), *Frozen Screams* or Uli Lommel's *Boogeyman* (or *Bogeyman* in the UK) films in the first place.

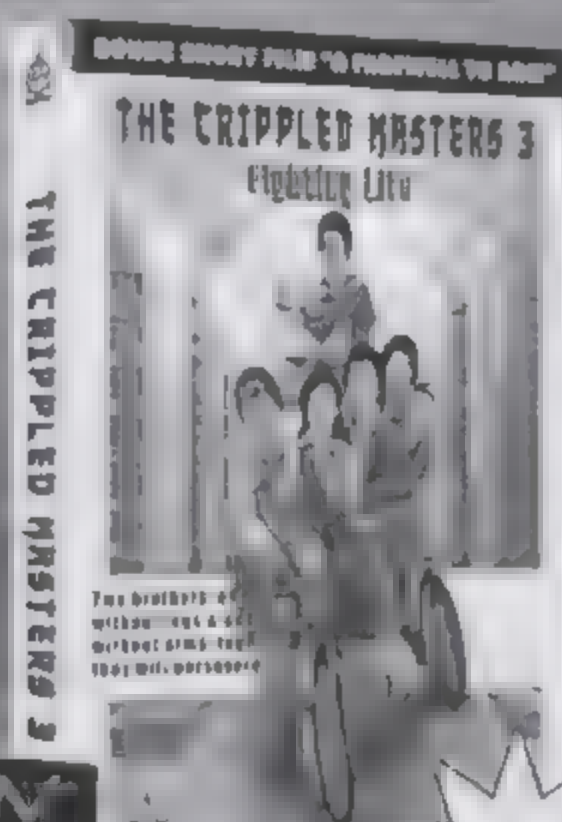
Do the math—there are over *ten hours* of thoughtful history and entertainment to be had here. But please note: this collection will *not* be coming to American DVD: if the specifically British nature of the history involved weren't enough, regulations involving the inclusion of archival news material will keep this collection restricted to UK release. You will only be able to partake of *Video Nasties: The Definitive Guide* if you order the import collection and equip yourself accordingly. Consider that my sincere recommendation.



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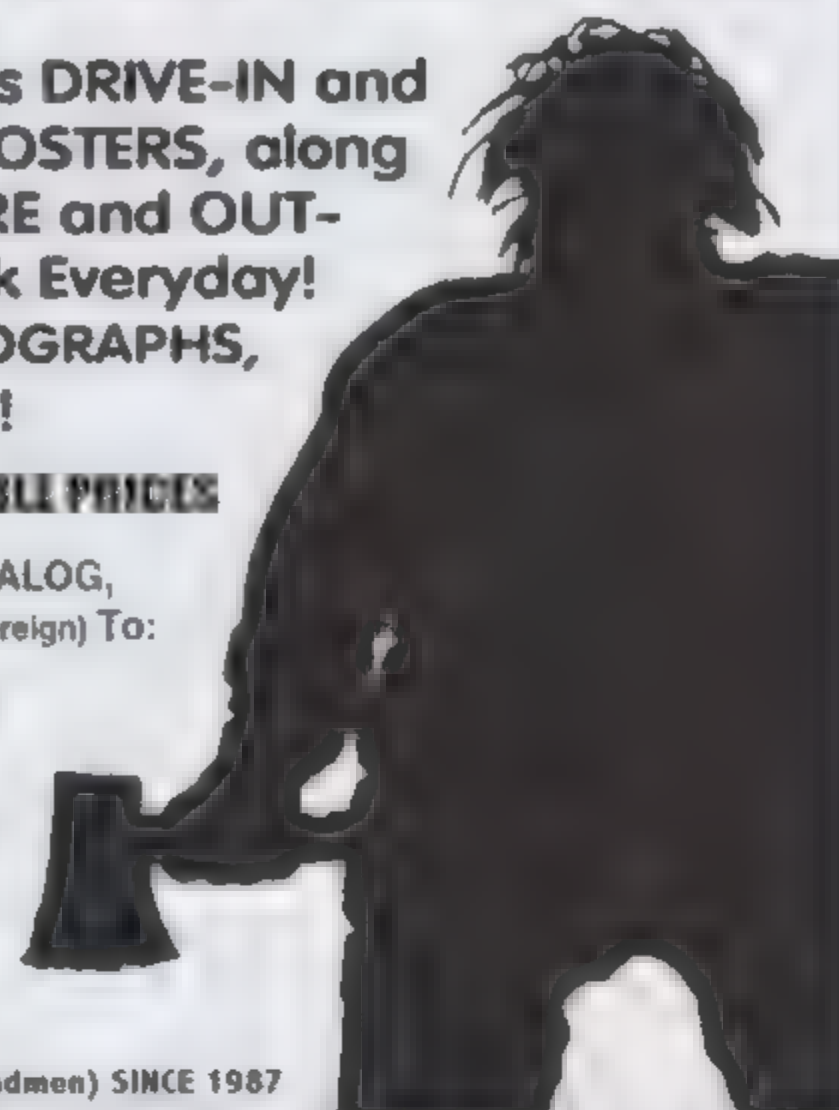
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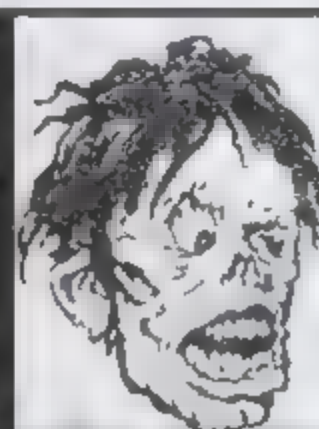
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## EMBODIMENT OF EVIL

Directed by Jose Mojica Marins  
(2008) Synapse Films Blu-ray/DVD combo



Brazilian filmmaker/media personality Jose Mojica Marins has resurrected his most famous creation, the homicidal undertaker-cum-madman (and cinematic alter ego) Zé do Caixão (also known as Coffin Joe), more than thirty years since the character's last appearance in the tour de force *Embodiment of Evil*. Joe, first introduced in 1963's *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*, is a Brazilian pop culture icon after having appeared on television shows, comic books, music, etc., over the years. Visually immortalized by his black cape, freakishly, gnarled fingernails, and top hat, the killer's sole purpose in life is to obtain the "perfect" woman through which he can achieve "continuity of the blood"—immortality via the preservation of his bloodline by a superior, male heir.

This quest encompasses the length of the original Coffin Joe Trilogy, comprised of the aforementioned *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* (1963), *This Night I'll Possess Your Corpse* (1967), and finally, *Embodiment of Evil* (2008). In earlier entries, Joe (with the aid of his disfigured manservant Bruno) lusts after a series of beautiful, young women, forcing himself upon and finally torturing them to find one strong enough in character and intelligence to sire his offspring. Along the way, his various victims are brutally bludgeoned, hung, incinerated, and subjected to a host of other horrible deaths as his determination to achieve perfection remains unshakable. All the while, the murderous undertaker is haunted by visions of Hell and the spirits of his victims, who vow to claim his soul for eternal damnation.

At the end of *This Night*, Joe's fate appears sealed as his body is pulled below a stagnant pond used to dump his victims, surrounded by angry villagers. However, Marins revisits history in *Embodiment* as the viewer learns that not only did Joe survive that watery grave, but ended up incarcerated instead within a mental hospital for the past forty years. While time took its toll upon the man's face and body, his will and goal remain uncorrupted. Still sporting his signature top hat and cape, Coffin Joe and Bruno relocate to a dungeon-like basement, hidden within one of Sao Paulo's dangerous favelas. Observing the once-virile killer in the midst of realistic urban squalor and sadistic policemen seemingly takes a bit of the sting out of his presence at first.

However, old habits quickly reappear as Joe soon commands a small retinue of loyal, youthful worshippers to carry out his bidding. His first act is to start assembling a new batch of women for testing, the first victim being a controversial geneticist named Hilda. Sharing his belief in the blood being the only source of immortality, Hilda is injected with a hallucinogen and subjected to violent visions of her body being filleted before her own eyes and presented as food. The sight of Marins' alter ego roughly sawing through thick chunks of flesh proves that he still possesses the stomach for bloodletting, albeit now on an unprecedented scale in comparison to the first two episodes. Passing the test, Hilda is allowed to become one of Joe's potential vessels.

Meanwhile, two brutal police captains, Claudimiro and Oswaldo, scour the city for the released madman with a personal score to settle from decades past. Aiding them is one Father Eugenio, a deranged, masochistic priest, who also desires Joe's demise for past transgressions against his family. Together, the trio leaves no stone unturned as their sadistic methods prove only a tad kinder than Joe's increasingly, elaborate slaughters. The film reaches its bloody crescendo as Joe completes his new collection of young women (after sending the city into a spiral of paranoid panic in the process) to torture and prepare for insemination. Observing naked women being branded, skinned, and crucified tests the limits of decency, even for horror, and makes Eli Roth-branded torture porn appear downright cuddly in comparison.

As the final, inevitable battle between Joe and his enemies commences, all one can be certain of is that no life shall be spared kindly. In returning to his signature character's main storyline after decades of inactivity, the director/star displays no rust at all in terms of thrusting the viewer back into the baroque, sexually charged universe that helped originally build his reputation. The melodramatic performances coupled with overwrought carnage hearken back to classic slasher/madmen films of the 60s and 70s. Coffin Joe himself, with his grandiose plots, fabulous costuming, and unflinching sadism, recalls the great villains portrayed by Vincent Price (i.e., Dr. Phibes) or the classic French literary and cinematic terrorist Fantomas.

Moreover, Marins ties up various plot strands from earlier in the series, such as the consistent haunting by the plethora of spirits dedicated to dragging his soul to Hell. *Embodiment* extends this concept to its logical extreme with the villain suffering through a series of vivid hallucinations in which each failed vessel from his past reappears before him, each comprised of grey, rotting flesh and coal black eyes, warning of his impending doom. The accumulated impact of these visions is akin to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, in which Richard (during the final act) is haunted in a dream by the souls of every innocent victim murdered in the name of his quest to become king.

One aspect of the murderer's personality that remains intact in this final installment is his ruthlessly solipsistic atheism; despite the heavy flirtations with witchcraft and the supernatural within the trilogy itself, Joe's own position is less sorcerer and more fascist. Seeking immortality not through spells and potions but via the purity of genetics is an intriguing left turn and allegorically recalls the true life horrors of the Third Reich's dalliances with eugenics before and during World War II. Both Joe and Hitler share the same despotic desire to craft a master race, in their own images of course. All in all, *Embodiment of Evil* provides a more than fitting close to a trilogy and character that has remained relevant for decades and showcases an artist whose talents remain undiluted and as vital as ever. The Blu-ray/DVD combo pack from Synapse Films contains several extras: a "making of" featurette; footage from the Fantasia Film Festival premiere of *Embodiment of Evil*; and, the film's original theatrical trailer.

Todd Konrad

## EYE OF THE DEVIL

Directed by J. Lee Thompson  
(1966) Warner Bros. Archives DVD-R

Wealthy landowner Philippe, the Marquis de Montfaucon, (David Niven) is called back to his ancestral home in rural France with the grave news that the recent grape harvest has failed. Leaving his wife (Deborah Kerr, *The Innocents*) and two children in Paris, the three later rejoin him at his family's sprawling castle in the countryside. Philippe's mother (Flora Robson, *Beast in the Cellar*) warns Kerr and the children to return home at once. Dismissing this worthwhile advice, Kerr and her kiddies are menaced by the vaguely satanic brother-and sister tag team of Christian (David Hemmings, *Blow Up*) and Odile (the Sharon Tate) who conspire to make things generally unpleasant. Hemmings enjoys showing off his archery skills, spearing doves in midflight when he isn't pointing arrows at the children! Tate in her slinky black-on-black Emma Peel garb lures the children and Kerr to their near death high on the castle's balconies, and mysterious figures in black robes begin to dot the surrounding countryside.

In the meantime, the taciturn Niven is resigned to his fate, quite unlike Edward Woodward in *The Wicker Man* (1972), of which *Eye of the Devil* predated by several years—the important difference being that *The Wicker Man* got it right while *Eye of the Devil* mostly got it all wrong.

There are many films available on direct-to-burn DVD-R's from Warner Home Archives, but *Eye of the Devil* isn't one of them. Long forgotten and rarely mentioned in horror genre surveys, the reason behind its obscurity is readily apparent. Cliché-ridden and overdone, *Eye of the Devil* failed to register with audiences.

*Eye of the Devil* has an unusually strong cast—this reviewer hasn't even mentioned the presence of Donald Pleasance (misspelled in the credits here as Pleasence) as a malevolent priest, in addition to breathtaking black-and-white cinematography by Erwin Hillier and opulent settings. The producers seemed intent on recapturing the success of *The Innocents* with the matronly Kerr presiding over a male and female child who briefly fall prey to supernatural forces.

Based on the novel "The Day of the Arrow" by Robin Estridge, *Eye of the Devil* is essentially the familiar story of "normal" people trapped in an irrational, threatening environment. Evil towns protecting nasty secrets, a trope used by H. P. Lovecraft and in such fright film fare as *Horror Hotel* (1960) and *2000 Maniacs* (1964). In contrast to the evil villagers in *The Wicker Man* and *2000 Maniacs*, who hide their murderous intentions with forced hospitality, the residents of the castle and surrounding community in *Eye of the Devil* are so comically malevolent that even the heartiest traveler would speed away into the nearest town. Kerr and her kids insist on staying in the castle come hell or high water, and even after the film's downbeat ending, the surviving characters drive off into the rain, accepting the diabolical machinations of the village with little or no complaint.

Prior to this film being made readily viewable, the only real cache it held was the fact it starred the ill-fated Sharon Tate in a story involving—irony of ironies, a satanic cult. Tate was one of the most beautiful women ever captured on film, and she's given a fairly substantial part as one of the cultists. It can be argued that the one role in Tate's limited filmography that truly foretold her grisly fate was her turn as the happy tavern wench who is set upon by vampire Ferdinand Mayne while she bathes in *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967), directed by her husband Roman Polanski. It's tragic to note that Tate's true real-life role was that of an innocent victim destroyed by an implacable evil.

Trivia fact: In addition to misspelling Donald Pleasance's name in the opening credits, the reputedly troubled production went under the title 13 in production. That's the title listed above the end title, an appropriate finale for a film that proved unlucky for both audiences and the producers alike.

Greg Goodsell



This is the climax in mind-chilling terror!



## DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS

(aka Les lèvres rouges)

Directed by Harry Kumel

(1971) Blue Underground Blu-ray

"Empty salons. Corridors. Salons. Doors. Doors. Salons. Empty chairs, deep armchairs, thick carpets. Heavy hangings. Stairs, steps. Steps, one after the other. Glass objects, objects still intact, empty glasses. A glass that falls, three, two, one, zero. Glass partition, letters.

The above quotation is taken from Giorgio Albertazzi's character known only as "X" in Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). French film actress Delphine Seyrig appeared in that film as a largely ornamental figure named "A," attired in beautiful gowns, swanning about in the above described hotel, engaged in a cryptic game of charades. Audiences flocked to the film to apply their own interpretations to the minimal, arbitrary story. The best way to approach *Marienbad*, many decided was accepting it as being all style and no substance, enjoyed for itself alone.

Ten years later, Seyrig would return again in more or less the same ornamental role in the Belgian vampire film *Daughters of Darkness*, as the Countess Bathory. Resembling a 1930s movie star, Bathory arrives in with her lovely consort Ilona (Andrea Rau) to an off-seaside luxury hotel with empty salons, corridors, salons, doors, doors, salons, empty chairs, deep armchairs, thick carpets, heavy hangings— you get the idea. They befriend a young newlywed couple, Stefan (John Karlan) and Valerie (Danielle Ouimet) who have issues. Married for only a few days, it becomes clear that Stefan is a casual sadist who abuses the all too-compliant Valerie.

The hotel's concierge (Paul Esser) remembers the Countess as being unchanged from 40 years ago, when he first saw her as a young boy. The Countess "bats" this suggestion away, and begins her seduction of the young couple, entertaining them with atrocious dinner-time stories of her namesake, a 16th Century monster who bathed in the blood of maidens in the pursuit of eternal youth.

Like *Marienbad*, there's really not much to say about *Daughters of Darkness*' story. One character "accidentally" dies, the three remaining hastily bury the victim at seaside, alliances shift, there is a deadly game as the survivors plays musical beds, there is more murder, discrete blood drinking and the film's conclusion makes plain that these games will continue to be played indefinitely.

*Daughters of Darkness* exists only and because of itself, little more than exquisitely polished surfaces reflecting each other into infinity. Feminist critics have since reinterpreted the lesbian vampire films of this era as a call of empowerment to women; the late Ingrid Pitt (see the last issue of *Screen* for more about her life and times) in such fare as *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) representing an embodiment of the feminine anima, a force of nature threatening the male-dominated establishment. It's only after these creatures are impaled with the phallic stake that order is restored—the surviving heroine made more acutely aware of her sexual options.

With all due respect, lesbian vampires at this point in popular film were little more than spice to a genre that was quickly growing stale, exciting the mostly male viewer for this type of film. *Daughters of Darkness* is oily, sensual and very silly, and resistant to such serious criticism. It looks great, and is highly artistic, but doesn't ask for the viewer to go looking for deeper analysis.

Director Harry Kumel's use of color and costume is very evident, and works in the use of muddying any symbolism viewers may want to apply to it. Both the Countess and Valerie wear striking white outfits, but these characters are anything but innocent, or any other connotation the color white may hold. All the characters at one point wear bright red—the color of blood. Ilona is the only character allowed to wear black, with a white Peter Pan collar her lips painted bright red well past her lip line.

The only apparent reason behind the wardrobe and color decisions is that it looks good. One scene, where the Countess has Ilona surreptitiously toss her highball into a nearby potted palm is a vibrant, Kelly green, making for a striking image. A contemporary of mine says he once interviewed Kumel where the director admitted his slavish devotion to the costumes in the films of Erich Von Stroheim.

The only real symbolism this reviewer has found in the film is one that other critics have failed to mention. Delphine Seyrig's look, all blonde, marcelled hair and slinky gowns has been likened to screen star Jean Harlow. I would peg Seyrig's look as being closer in style to such Third Reich favorites as Lillie Marlene and Marlene Dietrich. This makes chronological sense: when the vaguely Germanic concierge insists that he saw the Countess 40 years prior, in the early Thirties when the Nazis were rising to prominence in Europe. This certainly gives the scene where she coos about the tortures and torments doled out by her namesake a chilling, historical resonance, the most horrifying moment in an ostensible "horror" film.

Seyrig would die far too young, at the age of 58 in 1990. Her Countess doubtlessly led the way for Catherine Deneuve's overly chic night creature in *The Hunger* (1982), a more explicitly lesbian film with substantially more blood and gore. Deneuve remains the screen's most beautiful female vampire, but her sullen, self-important take on the character makes *The Hunger* a bit of a chore to sit through.

*Daughters of Darkness* calls to mind the drawings of Edward Gorey, with the characters gliding about in spacious settings. As in that celebrated cartoonist's world, terrible, dreadful things happen just outside the panel, and

not our concern. The film is very light on horror, but when it does appear, it's highly potent.

Watching *Daughters of Darkness* brought to mind a sumptuous weekend getaway I personally enjoyed in 1992, that in spite of—or precisely because of the loathsome circumstances surrounding it, became a cherished, dream-like memory.

As in the film, my friends and I had a lavish, five-star hotel largely to ourselves, the perfect place in which to strike up conversations with total strangers to share in the most delightful lies. *Daughters of Darkness* replicates this experience, with the more unsavory aspects of the situation remaining beyond the periphery of our vision—unless we chose to see them. Who could say no?

Greg Goodsell



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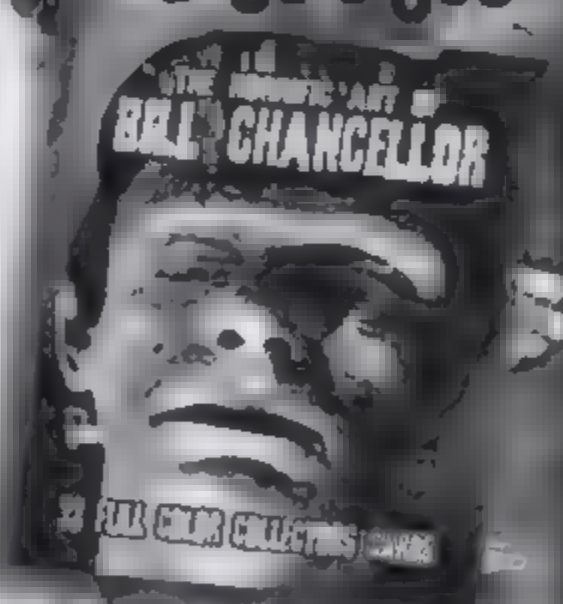
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# QUICK FLICKS

## Brief reviews and news



### WHICH WITCH?

Vincent Price fans (and really, who isn't?) will be excited to learn that one of the beloved actor's best films, *Witchfinder General* (aka *The Conqueror Worm*), is getting the deluxe Blu-ray treatment from Odeon Entertainment. Although this title is a U.K. import, the disc is region-free, which is a sigh of relief to many film fans who don't own an all-region Blu-ray player. Extras include: audio commentary with Michael Reeves' biographer Benjamin Halligan and director Michael Armstrong; two documentaries *The Blood Beast: The Films of Michael Reeves* and *Bloody Crimes: Witchcraft and Matthew Hopkins*; Vincent Price on *Aspel & Company*; *Intrusion*, a Michael Reeves short film; alternate scenes from the MGM domestic edition; theatrical trailer and stills gallery; and, the alternate U.S. opening and closing credits.

### LOCKED OUT!

More reasons to upgrade to an all-region Blu-ray player—Optimum Entertainment's special edition of Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*. We can't confirm at the time we are going to press if the disc is region B locked (Europe only), but Optimum is known for not being region-free friendly. Extras include: an introduction by Alan Jones; Nic Roeg commentary; a making of documentary; new interviews with composer Pino Donaggio, Danny Boyle, Allan Scott, Tony Richmond, and Donald Sutherland; and, an excerpt from the documentary *Nothing As It Seems*. Don't hold your breath for a domestic edition from Paramount.

### EVEN MORE (IMPORT)ANT NEWS

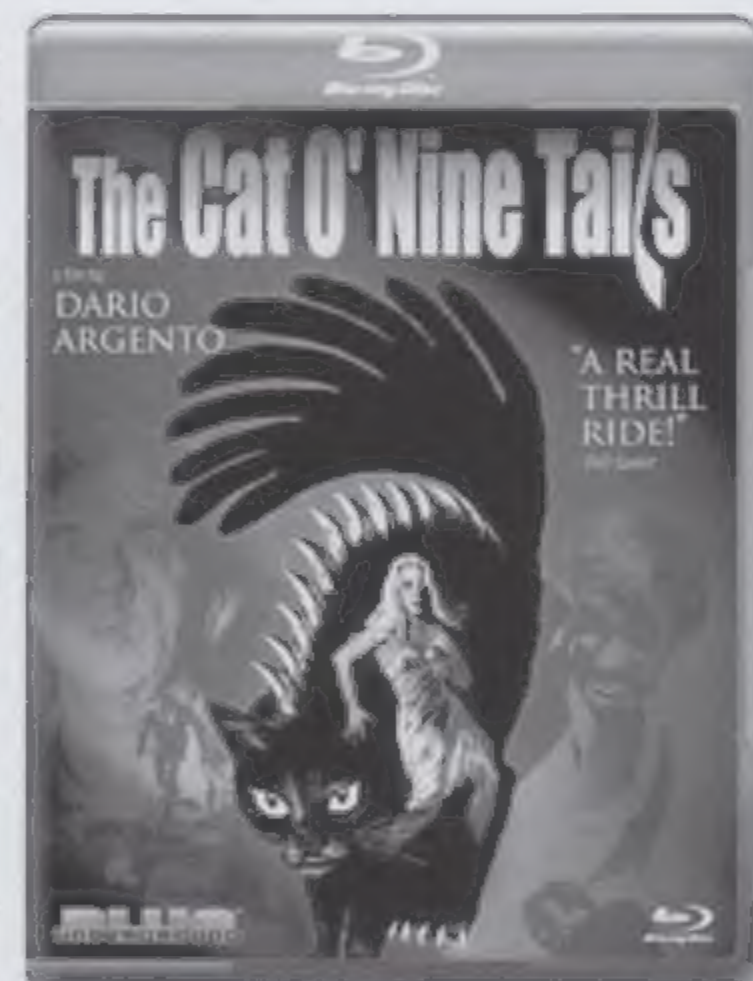
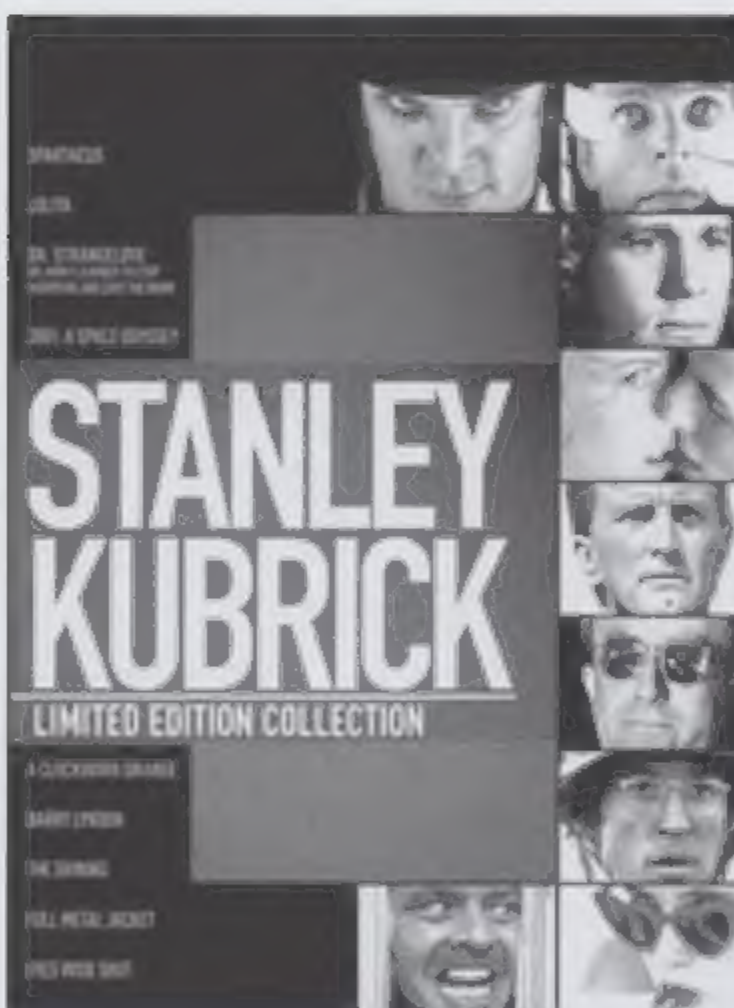
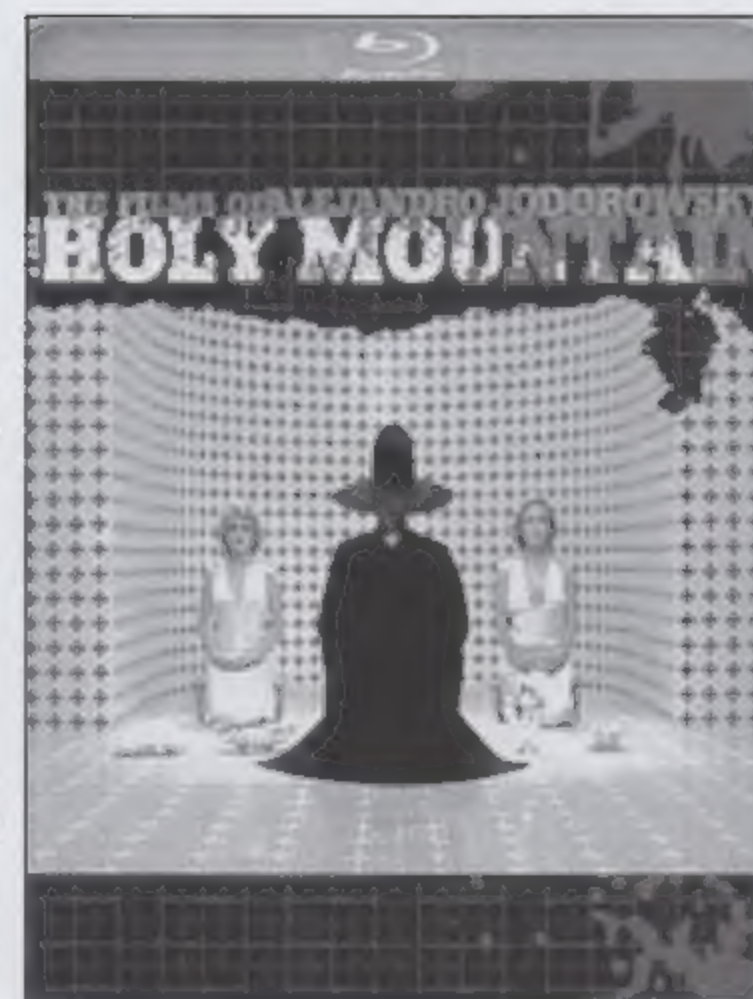
Late last year, Arrow Films U.K. issued a limited edition (10,000), region-free, three-disc Blu-ray box set of *Battle Royale*. The lavish box set sold out quickly and was re-issued a few months later. Unfortunately, the re-release was stripped of all the goodies the original box contained: a 32-page comic; a 36-page booklet; original promotional material; cast and crew biographies; a 16-page booklet which features concept artwork; and, finally, 5" x 7" postcards of stills from the film. To add insult to injury, Arrow's new *Battle Royale* set is now region B encoded. For those (ok, most) who missed out on getting their hands on this treasure, Anchor Bay U.S. now owns the rights to *Battle Royale*, so a domestic release is forthcoming. Whether or not all the bells and whistles from Arrow's limited set will appear on these shores is anyone's guess.

### 2011: A SPENDING NIGHTMARE

If you haven't picked up any Stanley Kubrick films on Blu-ray, now is the time to jump on Warner Bros. fantastic nine-film collection. It contains the previously released *A Clockwork Orange*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Spartacus*, *The Shining*, *2001 A Space Odyssey*, *Eyes Wide Shut*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and two new to Blu titles *Lolita* and *Barry Lyndon*. The box retails for \$150. Here is where things get messy—the only way to purchase *Lolita* and *Barry Lyndon* on Blu-ray in the U.S. is to buy this set, although both films can be purchased separately from the Amazon.com German or French website (region-free friendly). Not included in the box set, but available as a stand alone two-disc set, is a brand new 40th Anniversary digibook Blu-ray for *A Clockwork Orange*, which has all the extras ported over from the original 2007 high-definition edition and adds the documentary *Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures*, plus a new featurette *Turning Like Clockwork*, as well as a 40-page book containing rare photos and production notes. Dizzy yet?

### LET'S WRAP IT UP

New to Blu: *Mother's Day* from Troma (we can now see Queenie in all her HD glory!); Alejandro Jodorowsky's *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain* (both from Anchor Bay); from Blue Underground *The Nesting* (also known as *Massacre Mansion* and *Phobia*); and, Dario Argento's *The Cat O' Nine Tails*. Here are a few DVD titles to recommend. Code Red delivers *Where Time Began* (previously released on DVD as *The Fabulous Journey to the Center of the Earth*) paired with the Rod Serling trilogy thriller *Encounter with the Unknown*. VCI Entertainment unleashes a 12-film, four-disc collection (only \$14.99 retail) titled *Scream Theater*. Over 18 hours of cheap thrills are presented here for your viewing pleasure. Films include: *Alice Sweet Alice*, *Beast of the Yellow Night*, *Beyond Atlantis*, *Death Game*, *Don't Open the Door*, *House of the Living Dead*, *The Night Creature*, *Scream Bloody Murder*, *Sisters of Death*, *Twilight People*, *The Vampire Happening*, and *Young Hannah: Queen of the Vampires*.





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